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THE SCIENCE OF PRAYER

The Science of Prayer

By

Ludovic de Besse, O.S.F.C.

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PREFACE

THIS small book has been written in order to make the teaching of S John of the Cross on Interior Prayer more widely known. It also seemed fitting to offer it to the General of the Order of Discalced Carmelites. As is well known, this Order was reformed by S Teresa with the help of S John of the Cross. Among them the doctrine of the great Spanish mystic should be known to perfection, and they are competent to judge whether we have set it forth perfectly and faithfully. The Very Rev. Fr. Rinaldo Marie de Saint-Juste was not satisfied with merely reading the volume. He wished further to have it examined by one of his religious who was a well-known authority on this delicate subject. This theologian's opinion was entirely favourable, and the Very Rev. Father-General had no hesitation in writing the following letter authorizing us to publish it:

ROME,
June 4, 1903.

DEAR REVEREND FATHER,

Very many thanks for the spiritual help which I received from reading your excellent book *The Science of Prayer*. Although, as you can say in Chapter XXXI, similar knowledge can be acquired from the teaching and writings of the saints who have made a prolonged practice of it, yet you are certain to achieve your purpose by acquiring it from the works of the mystical doctor S John of the Cross, S Teresa, S Francis de Sales, and S Jane Frances de Chantal, who are unassailable teachers of this divine science. But it is not everyone who can drew his knowledge from sources so pure. Accordingly he must find this doctrine of the saints in authors who summarize their teaching and make it

accessible to the ordinary reader by setting it out in an orderly and methodical manner.

If this is true, allow me to say, dear Father, that your book places you among those authors of whom you have just spoken, and in my opinion your work is destined to do very much good. Safe teaching, thoroughly understood, and lucidly expressed in a simple and natural style, makes this splendid book a perfect treasure in its own sphere. It should be in the hands of every person given to prayer. Especially the clergy, who could very easily acquire for themselves the theory and practice of the science of interior prayer. They would, moreover, find in it safe and clear direction for those souls who are called to perfection by means of familiar intercourse with God.

To conclude this letter, which is already of great length, I ask you to accept my heartiest congratulations. At the same time I thank you for having spoken so well about the mystical doctrine of my Father S John of the Cross. He is for Mysticism what the Angel of the Schools is for Theology. May your book make this great mystical saint better known and loved. For I am afraid that in our day his teaching is but little understood. I am afraid that through fear of the illusions to which some interior souls are subject, we may end by keeping them far away from that close intercourse with God which has always been the foundation of great saints.

Asking your prayers, dear Reverend Father, and with kindest regards,

I am,
Your obedient servant,
FR. RINALDO MARIE DE SAINT-JUSTE,
Superior-General of the Discalced Carmelites.

M. l'Abbé Saudreau has honoured us with the following letter. He is the well-known author of *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, and of *The Life of Union with God*. These mystical works show him to be a master of the subject. We value his criticism very highly indeed.

ANGERS,
March 4, 1903.

REVEREND FATHER,

Thank you so much for sending me your *Science of Prayer*. It is a little difficult for me to send my congratulations. The praise which you have lavished upon me would appear to lend a motive to my words. All the same, I must tell you—and you will not be surprised—that your teaching is most acceptable to me, and I promise most faithfully to make your book widely known. I think it most practical, and exactly of the nature to dispel prejudice and bring enlightenment to very many souls.

The first chapters are of course most valuable, but it is the " Prayer of Faith " that you explain with singular success. The special interest and the chief utility of your book lies in that subject. This prayer is a gift, a special grace which is granted, at least habitually, to fervent and detached souls alone. No one doubts that. But how can I refrain from praising you when you show that it is a most desirable grace; that it is a prayer of the utmost safety because it attains for the soul an elevated and priceless knowledge of God, and makes it practise in a wonderful manner the love of God and the more important virtues? Your teaching is very clear, no small achievement in this difficult subject; and it is drawn from a good source. S John of the Cross is the first among your masters, and S Jane Frances de Chantal, Bossuet, and Père de Caussade add their teaching to that of the great mystic. Persons who are in the " arid " state of contemplation will find your book particularly useful. These persons very often possess the signs which indicate the contemplative state as pointed out by S John of the Cross, but very often—which the saint also mentions and deplores—they do not understand what God is asking from them, and do not follow the way by which he is leading them. Your book will give them encouragement, and will help them to perceive the divine call and follow it.

There is indeed a difference of opinion between us, which you point out in Chapter IX. This is not the

place to enlarge upon it; in a work, printed at the same time as your own, which will be in your hands in a week or two, *The Mystical State: its Nature and Phases*, I explain at some length the point on which we do not agree. I will only remark now that the difference is not so great as would appear, for while we both admit a divine "contact," you assign as its effect "sentiments of love," whereas I am in favour of "a spiritual sensation." You acknowledge that God at the same time "makes his presence known by a light of faith which is directed upon the highest point of the intellect." There is then a divine action upon the highest point of the intelligence, and also a divine action which produces a love, without understanding, yet most intense. I admit with you that this is certainly the teaching of the mystics. But I think that in the second case God acts upon the will, which is the seat of the affections. You think that there is a contact of substances. We differ on that point, but in the main we attribute to the mystic state the same phenomena, and the same essential elements.

Please accept, dear Father, my kindest regards and heartiest congratulations.

A. Saudreau.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
	PREFACE	V
CHAPTER		
I.	DEFINITION OF PRAYER	1
II.	NECESSITY OF PRAYER	5
III.	PRAYER IS A GRACE	10
IV.	HOW THE GRACE OF PRAYER INCREASES IN THE SOUL	14
V.	THE GRACE OF PRAYER IS NOT ALWAYS GIVEN TO SOULS IN THE SAME MANNER	18
VI.	THE PRAYER OF MEDITATION	23
VII.	DANGERS OF THE MIND IN MEDITATION	28
VIII.	AFFECTIVE PRAYER	33
IX.	THE PRAYER OF FAITH	38
X.	DIFFERENT NAMES OF THE PRAYER OF FAITH	44
XI.	SOME NECESSARY EXPLANATIONS	48
XII.	PRAYER OF FAITH AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY	62
XIII.	PRAYER OF FAITH A COMMON GRACE	69
XIV.	IGNORANCE OF THE TRUTH CONTAINED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER IS VERY HARMFUL TO SOULS: DENIAL OF IT IS FATAL	76
XV.	AN OBJECTION ANSWERED	85
XVI.	SECURITY OF THE PRAYER OF FAITH	92
XVII.	THE ACTS DURING THE PRAYER OF FAITH	98
XVIII.	THE FIRST ACT IN THE PRAYER OF FAITH	103
XIX.	OTHER ACTS IN THE PRAYER OF FAITH	109

CHAPTER		PAGE
XX.	CHARITY IN THE PRAYER OF FAITH	114
XXI.	THE PRACTICE OF THE PRAYER OF FAITH	119
XXII.	PROGRESS IN THE PRAYER OF FAITH	126
XXIII.	PRAYER OF FAITH AND SIN	132
XXIV.	PRAYER OF FAITH AND DIVINE UNION	137
XXV.	MIRACULOUS STATES OF PRAYER	142
XXVI.	PRAYER OF FAITH AND DEVOTION TO THE SAINTS	146
XXVII.	WHAT IS THE BEST KIND OF PRAYER?	151
XXVIII.	IMPERFECT PRAYERS	157
XXIX.	FALSE PRAYERS	162
XXX.	CONVERSION AND THE PRAYER OF FAITH	168
XXXI.	EPILOGUE: PRAYER IS A SCIENCE	175
	APPENDIX: A SHORT DIRECTION FOR CONTEMPLATIVE SOULS BY S. JOHN OF THE CROSS	181

THE SCIENCE OF PRAYER

CHAPTER I

DEFINITION OF PRAYER

To have a low idea of prayer is to pray badly. This is so with a great many Christians, who are not sufficiently instructed in their religion. Self-interest overpowers and inspires them. In their eyes prayer is a duty, disagreeable but necessary in order to appease God. They wish to propitiate him, to obtain from him the good things of this world, and hereafter the blessings of eternal life. They reverse the positions of the soul and God. They intend with the help of prayer to make the Creator the humble servant of his creature. That the pagan mind should entertain such gross ideas is conceivable, but Christians are the recipients of revealed teaching, which has been given in order to lift up their thoughts to a higher plane. What should be the Christian idea of prayer? If we consider our Lord's answer to his Apostles when they asked him about it, prayer is, strictly speaking, the exercise of three theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. It is, in fact, expressed by the "Our Father," which begins with these petitions: "Hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Examine each of these without considering the four petitions which follow; for these are the corollary and practical application of the first petition. To make God's name holy is to know him as the angels do; to admire his infinite perfections and to join in the praise of the

seraphim: "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts: all the earth is full of his glory."[1] But the Catholic Faith alone is able to lift us up to such a sublime knowledge of God, and to make us join with the angels in proclaiming the holiness of his name. Prayer in the first place, then, is an exercise of the virtue of Faith.

It is, moreover, the exercise of Hope and of Charity undefiled. We say: "Thy kingdom come." We do not mean here a temporal kingdom; God enjoys this essentially over material creation; in this regard there is nothing further we can desire for him. The sun and starry heavens, the air, water, fire, plants, and animals of the earth, have always observed and always will observe until the end of time the laws implanted in them by their Creator. There is also a temporal government as regards the ruling of men. But God does not want to make use of it on this earth. "My kingdom is not of this world."[2] What, then, is the kingdom of God, the coming of which we pray for? It is his reign in our hearts, a kingdom of the spirit, the fruit of trust and love. To say to God, "Thy kingdom come," is consequently the equivalent of saying, "Widen my heart with appreciation of thy goodness, and fill it with childlike confidence in thee; make me realize at their true value the favours which thou hast showered upon me . . . and my soul will overflow with gratitude. Deign to reveal thy beauty to me, thy infinite perfections . . . and my only delight will be in thee, loving also in thee all thy creatures. Make firm thy kingdom in my heart by Hope and Charity. Be thou the Ruler of all my affections."

To make this second petition of the "Our Father" acceptable to God, the setting up of his kingdom in our heart must be sincerely desired. And we would not know how to have such a desire if we did not firmly believe that this kingdom was possible; also besides believing in the possibility of it, we must have the firmest hope in its fulfilment. This petition, then, is an act of the virtue of Hope. On the other hand, it would be

[1] Isa. vi 3. [2] John xviii 36.

rash to confine our attention exclusively to the goodness of God. Our Hope must be accompanied by a resolution to do our part in the establishment of this kingdom. Our Lord immediately enjoins us to add: "Thy will be done, as it is done in heaven by the angels and saints." Here is an act of Love, an act of real Charity. God thus becomes the Ruler of all our actions after becoming the Ruler of our understanding and of our affections.

When the Carmelites asked S Teresa to teach them how to pray, she did as they wished by composing a beautiful treatise, a masterpiece of spiritual direction—*The Way of Perfection*. Well, everything in this book turns on an explanation of the "Our Father." We pray when we keep in mind the petitions which Christ framed in the Lord's Prayer. We do not pray, or we pray imperfectly, if we make petitions which have no connection with those of the "Our Father." Every prayer should resolve itself into Faith, Hope, and Charity. By this means alone can a perfect prayer be framed. In conclusion, here is a definition of prayer given by the Angelic Doctor. It is taken with the accompanying commentary from S Alphonsus Liguori, and has a place at the head of a valuable treatise written by this saint, in which a great many scriptural and patristic texts are drawn together. Constant use is made of this source. This small work of S Alphonsus is entitled *The Chief Means of Prayer*. "The Apostle," he says, "wrote to Timothy: 'I desire therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men.'[1] The Angelic Doctor, S Thomas,[2] explaining this passage, says that prayer is a raising of the soul to God in order to obtain some grace. When the object of it is some definite thing the prayer is rightly called *petition*. When the things are not definite, for instance when we say: 'Help me, O God: *Deus in adjutorium meum intende*,' then it is *supplication*. *Entreaty* is a holy insistence in order to obtain the desired grace, as when we say: 'By thy cross and passion deliver us,

[1] 1 Tim. ii 1. [2] S Th. 2-2, 83, 17.

O Lord.' Finally *thanksgiving* is the thanks which we give for benefits received, and by which, says S Thomas, we merit still greater graces: *Gratias agentes meremur accipere potiora.*"

We must end our definitions and continue our study.

CHAPTER II

NECESSITY OF PRAYER

All of us are rapidly approaching death. But our soul is immortal, and beyond the tomb God will be awaiting it. He has promised to take us to his own, and make us partakers of his eternal bliss, if, before leaving the earth, we consent to become his friends. On what conditions may we merit his friendship? The chief condition is never to forget him, but to seek him with the firm resolve to believe, obey, and love him. These are the means of becoming his friends in this world. In these days, plenty of good people disdain the use of prayer, and calmly approach death trusting to their natural virtues. They flatter themselves that they will be received there with every kind of honour and regard, on account of their merits. Certainly, good actions are worthy of reward, and God, who is Justice itself, will not abandon anyone without fully repaying all that is due. But no matter if they had done countless good works, these would not be sufficient to merit his friendship unless done for God's sake.

We are all free to choose our friends. We allow no one to force his way into our house, and sit down at our table unasked, no matter how talented and virtuous he may be. He must first be introduced to us, be in accordance with our taste, and even then wait until we invite him. Is God to be denied the same right of being Master in his own house and choosing his own circle? It is good to be virtuous. But virtue is moral wealth and somewhat similar to material wealth. Before we esteem a rich man we want to see how he uses his money. If he makes good use of it, if he devotes a part of it to good works, we admire him; but we despise him if he uses it for immoral and dishonest purposes. If you are honest for your own advantage, or from self-

admiration, then you are selfish and proud. If you are virtuous like the Pharisees, in order to gain the praise of men, then you are vain. Jesus Christ said of these: "They have received their reward"[1] by receiving praise, and they will not be rewarded in any other way. S Augustine adds "*vani vanam*"—for the vain a vain reward. You have done good without thinking of God, whereas he commands you to do it in order to obey him, and gain his friendship; what sort of eternal reward can you suppose that you will have? Assuredly it cannot be sitting at the same table with Jesus Christ, since you have rejected his love. Perhaps you would like to enjoy for eternity the love of creatures, and other pleasures which were lost at the moment of death? These goods are yours now through God's generosity, and you do not know how to thank him for them; it would be a strange thing if he rewarded your ingratitude by giving them to you again for all time.

No, there is but one way of gaining eternal happiness, and that is by fulfilling the first and greatest commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."[2] But this commandment is fulfilled in prayer and by prayer alone. To love anyone we must know him and be often in his company. Well, pray then to God and by that means you will draw very near to him. S Paul taught this truth to the wise men of the Areopagus: "That they should seek God, if happily they may feel after him or find him, although he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live and move and be."[3] We cannot see God in this world, but he makes his presence felt in sincere souls who reverently, confidently, and lovingly call upon him. In commanding us to love and adore him, he has undertaken to listen to us, and grant our petitions. When we forget him we are far from him, and he is far from our side. If we but think of him, he draws near to us in the close contact of prayer, and ends by becoming our friend. . . . Thus little by little

[1] Matt. vi 2. [2] Luke x 27.
[3] Acts xvii 27.

there enters into the soul that pure charity which makes us worthy of an everlasting reward.

That is the reason why prayer is so necessary. It is necessary in order to *regain the friendship* of God, if we have lost our baptismal grace by falling into mortal sin. If we have preserved that grace undefiled, it is still necessary for *maintaining, strengthening, and developing our intimacy with God* by means of the frequent exercise of the theological virtues. And finally it is necessary for *overcoming temptation* which entices us to sin, and which arises from our fallen state, the malice of the Devil, and the pitfalls of this world. Left to ourselves we are too weak to resist these allurements. We need God's assistance, and to obtain it we must ask him for it. We have just said that virtues without charity are incapable of making us the friends of God. And it frequently happens that through rejecting the love of God we become deficient in virtue. For love is the best way of becoming virtuous, since it makes us desire to be like to God by conducting ourselves in the most perfect manner: "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."[1] The way to please God is to aspire always to this perfection for love of him. We do this successfully, when by fervent and repeated prayer we procure the abundant assistance of his grace.

Those who advocate only natural righteousness stop short when they have satisfied their self-love, and they do not proceed further on to the love of God. They are never sure of standing firm, if their virtue is put to a severe test. Besides, what is the worth of a virtuous life which respects the rights of creatures but does not respect the rights of the Creator? The sincere lover of God, on the other hand, is sure to overcome all his enemies, if he has recourse to prayer; and should he be almost sinking, prayer will be the plank of safety. By prayer he will be able to raise himself up again, and even draw good out of evil, profiting by his fall in becoming more humble, more prudent, and more attached to God by the bond of confidence and

[1] Matt. v 48.

love, making reparation for his faults by the exercise of good works and repentance. These truths are contained in Revelation, and they are numbered among the dogmas of the Catholic Faith. They rest on countless texts of Holy Scripture and tradition, the more important of which we will call attention to. Listen to some of the words of our Lord: "We ought always to pray and not to faint";[1] "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation";[2] "Ask and you shall receive."[3]

S Augustine says: "God is willing to give us his graces, but he only gives them to those who ask."[4] He says again: "Just as the body is nourished by food, so the interior man (*i.e.*, the moral virtuous man) is nourished by prayer."[5] S Chrysostom speaks in the same strain.[6] The learned Lessius speaks in these terms: "It is an article of faith that for adults prayer is necessary for salvation.[7] Following S Alphonsus Liguori, he is here speaking not of a "necessity of precept" which admits exceptions in cases of ignorance, impossibility, etc., but of "a necessity of means." Ships are the necessary means for crossing the sea, airships for ascending into the sky, etc. If you refuse to get into an airship you will never ascend into the air; in the same way, if you neglect prayer you will never get to heaven. S Alphonsus concludes thus: "All the blessed, except infants, have saved their souls by means of prayer. All the damned have lost their souls because they have not prayed. If they had prayed they would not be lost. In hell the source of their greatest despair is, and always will be, the fact that they could have saved their souls so easily by asking from God the graces which they needed, but now there is no longer 'time' in which to ask them."[8]

We must make our choice, then. Either draw nigh to God in prayer; you will then become his friend; you

[1] Luke xviii 1.
[2] Matt. xxvi 41.
[3] John xvi 24.
[4] On Ps. cii.
[5] *De Sal. Doc.*, c. 78.
[6] *De Orat. Dom.*, c. i.
[7] *De Just.*, l. ii, c. 37, d. 3.
[8] *Chief Means of Prayer*, Part I, ch. i: Conclusion.

will be enriched with virtue, and merit in proportion to the fervour of your prayers, and you will without fail attain the reward of heaven, and enjoy eternal happiness. Or else refuse to pray, and you will remain far from God. But even on this earth to be far from God is the greatest moral misery, no matter how fair the appearance under which it is concealed; and after death to be far from God is hell.

CHAPTER III

PRAYER IS A GRACE

THERE are many kinds of graces. Some are altogether extraordinary, such as the power of working miracles, the prophetic spirit, the gift of tongues, etc. These graces cause universal wonderment by revealing the power of God. But although they are generally given to saints, they have no value in their personal sanctification. Sometimes they are given to sinners, who end by falling into hell. Judas probably had the gift of miracles just like the other Apostles, but what use did he make of it? There are also graces which theologians call *gratis datae* (given gratuitously)—that is to say, without any merit on the part of the receivers, and without profiting them in any way. God grants them solely for the benefit of others. Consequently they are somewhat formidable favours. We should rather fear them than wish for them. But the same does not apply to "sanctifying grace" (*gratia gratum faciens*), which makes us acceptable to God. Following the teaching of S Thomas, this grace is *a participation of the Divine nature granted to our souls;* it is the beginning of glory everlasting, and opens the gate of heaven for us. A mirror placed in the light of the sun reflects its rays and reproduces its image. Man is the mirror of the Godhead. When he turns away from God who is Light he is thrown into the deepest darkness. But if he turns towards him, God looks upon him with pleasure, and fills his soul with light.

Sanctifying grace, then, is a "quality" which supernaturalizes the life of man. With it there come also the infused virtues, and *the gifts of the Holy Spirit.* Virtue is a force by which we produce good acts. If this force is purely natural, the goodness of our actions will not exceed earthly limits, and will be incapable of meriting heaven. To be worthy of an eternal reward

our acts must proceed from a supernatural principle. The Holy Spirit brings this force, when he clothes our souls with the infused virtues and his heavenly gifts. Infused virtue is not confined to faith, hope, and charity, but also includes the ordinary moral virtues, making them supernatural by energizing them with divine vigour. Thus Christian temperance, exercised for the sake of penance, far surpasses that of the world, which avoids excess in order not to endanger health. This is natural, whereas the first is supernatural. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are likewise qualities, divine forces. They differ from virtues, inasmuch as they enrich the soul with truly spiritual gifts. It is a gift of nature which makes men poets, musicians, artists. The gifts of the Holy Spirit render like services to souls.

But these favours, joined to sanctifying grace, are first given to us in a very rudimentary form. We are born to the life of the spirit just as we are to the life of the body. The infant when it comes into the world has a complete vital organism, but it is an organism without power. Forces which it must use when it reaches maturity have only a germinal existence in its small body. They remain dormant and must be developed by prolonged exercise. If parental love is not exerted to preserve the infant's health, by careful nourishment and warding off every disease, it will soon die. If devoted teachers do not take the trouble to instruct and form it in the practice of virtue, it will remain ignorant and will become vicious. It is exactly the same for the spiritual child of grace. It has received the infused virtues, and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, in a delicate germinal state. They need loving care in order to be developed and strengthened. Admire the infinite goodness of God, which well-nigh ravishes our soul. The Holy Spirit is himself the trainer of the spiritual child. *He has sown the most fruitful seed in the garden of our soul, and it is he who cultivates it by means of "actual grace."*

This grace is an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, filling our minds with good thoughts, inflaming our hearts

with holy desires, strengthening the will, and encouraging it in the practice of virtue. We must assist the work of the Holy Spirit by corresponding to the impulse of actual grace. While doing good we must say with S Paul: "Not I, but the grace of God with me: *gratia Dei mecum.*"[1] Now *the first actual grace given to the soul by the Holy Spirit is the grace of prayer.* It is he who makes us pray. S Paul teaches this explicitly: "We know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings."[2] "You have received the spirit of adoption of sons whereby we cry: Abba, Father."[3] With truly infinite goodness this grace of prayer is given to all men without exception, and is never taken away from them. It remains with them until their last breath. When they have dismissed God by mortal sin, he stands at the door and knocks.[4] He urges sinners to repentance by the fear of his justice and the hope of pardon. He allows sinners to enter into themselves, and to lend ear to the voice of conscience, in order to listen to these exhortations of the Holy Spirit. At times God adds external calls to the interior promptings of his grace, using various means to arrest the attention of souls and make them pray. "Wisdom preacheth abroad, she uttereth her voice in the streets. Fools, how long will you covet those things which are hurtful to yourselves? Turn ye at my reproof. Behold I will utter my spirit to you, and will show you my words. Because I called and you refused."[5]

S Alphonsus Liguori ends his book *The Chief Means of Prayer* by a lengthy proof of this truth. He gives a whole chapter entitled: "God gives the grace of prayer to all men if they desire it. In order to pray, only that grace is necessary which is common to all." This chapter is divided into three principal sections. The first cites the authority of theologians who teach this doctrine. The second gives passages from Holy

[1] 1 Cor. xv 10.
[2] Rom. viii 26.
[3] Rom. viii 15.
[4] Apoc. iii 20.
[5] Prov. i 20.

Scripture, the Council of Trent, and many of the Fathers. The third contains an argument from theological reasoning. From his proof we gather that even the greatest criminals have grace sufficient for their own salvation. Of course, this *sufficient grace* does not enable them to overcome directly all their sins. But it does suffice, and is really *efficacious*, if they desire it, in enabling them to pray and perform other good works, such as spiritual reading. They would obtain in this way a more powerful grace, which would assist them to fulfil more difficult duties. "On this principle," says S Alphonsus, "sinners who pretend that they are not strong enough to overcome their temptations are inexcusable; for if only they would pray, which they can do with the grace given to everyone, they would obtain the strength they need, and would be saved."[1]

S Francis de Sales, speaking of final perseverance, teaches the same doctrine: "The gift of prayer and devotion is freely given to those who with a good heart are willing to consent to the inspiration from heaven. Consequently final perseverance rests in our power."[2] Yes, the divine generosity is most lavish in the way it sheds upon our souls the gift of prayer. The Holy Spirit bears patiently with the sinners who reject him. He stands by them without ceasing in order to help them to pray. How much more liberal, then, would he be with those who open wide their hearts to give themselves up obediently to his inspirations? He is so touched by humility of soul that he puts no limit to his generosity.

The prophet Zacharias has uttered the message: "I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of prayers, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and shall contemplate me with love."[3] This was the prophecy of the miracle of Pentecost. The same miracle is renewed in every soul, when abandoning itself unreservedly to the spirit of prayer.

[1] Part II, c. iv, 53. [2] *Love of God*, iii, c. 1.
[3] xii 10.

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE GRACE OF PRAYER INCREASES IN THE SOUL

It is impossible to merit grace with that real merit which compels God in justice to give it to us. We can, with the assistance of grace, merit heaven. The day will come when our supernatural virtues will receive their just reward. But grace, as the very name indicates, is always a free and gratuitous gift.

Are we, then, left entirely to the good pleasure of God? Are we unable to do anything to draw upon ourselves his abundant graces, and make easy our salvation? Is sanctity reserved for a small number of souls? Are the majority, even among Christians, to spend their whole lives on a much lower plane, without any hope of departing from it? Take courage; if we cannot appear proudly in God's sight saying confidently like the Pharisee, "I have practised every virtue; I have done many good works; I come now to claim my reward, asking of thee grace in proportion to my merits," yet we have another way of touching the heart of God, and sharing abundantly in the treasure of his graces. This way is exactly the opposite of the proud Pharisee; it is to pray, not by calling attention to our merits, but by confessing our unworthiness and calling upon the infinite mercy of God. We have many claims on his graces. The merits of Jesus Christ are greater than ours; the goodness of God, his liberality, his promises to us, his command to put our trust in him and ask his aid with the certainty of our prayer being heard—all these are claims of the greatest worth, and God will not suffer them to pass unheeded.

We have it in our power, then, to gain very many graces, from the sole fact of striving to acquire the virtue of humility. "God resisteth the proud and

giveth grace to the humble."[1] S James does not speak here of that external show of humility which may very easily develop into pride. He means humility of heart, internal humility, the sublime virtue which takes away all deceit from man's heart, and envelops it in the full beam of truth. For it consists in the *frequent comparison of ourselves with God*, in order to know his strength and our weakness, his holiness and our unworthiness, his wisdom and our folly. He is everything and we are nothing. Our Lord urges us to practise this humility when he says: "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart."[2] Obedient to his exhortation, the saints never ceased to say to God in prayer: "Lord, what art thou, and what am I? Grant that I may know thee and know myself! Thou hast created me, have pity on me." Humility such as this has great effect, and brings down upon us the abundant treasures of divine grace. When man is proud and exalts himself in God's presence, He withdraws himself still further away and looks upon man with disdain: "*Alta a longe cognoscit.*" But if only man humbles himself, God also comes down to him. He draws near and looks on him with love, and showers his favours upon him: "*Humilia respicit.*"[3]

Why is there such extraordinary power in humility? It comes from the desire God has for his own glory. He said by the mouth of Isaias: "I am the Lord, and I will not give my glory to another."[4] And how could a creature, with God's consent, take to himself the glory of the Creator? All the good things of creation, both of the present life and of the life to come, are for our use. God has no need of them, and has left them to us. But the glory of creation belongs to him alone. Now the proud man tries to take this glory to himself in the supernatural sphere; but the humble man refers it all to God, without taking the smallest portion for himself. We can well understand why God, in dispensing his graces, is so jealous of his own glory, since creation results from the works of grace: "Send forth

[1] Jas. iv 6.
[2] Matt. xi 29.
[3] Ps. cxxxvii 6.
[4] Isa. xlviii 11.

thy spirit, and they shall be created: and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.[1] In this creation, man works with God, and associates with him. Social convention gives to man all the advantages of virtue and good works; glory alone is reserved to God. If man takes to himself this part which belongs to God alone, he is a thief. How could the Holy Spirit continue to work with a dishonest associate? He draws himself far away and refuses to bestow his grace on the proud. On the other hand, *the man of deep humility pleases God by his very honesty.* The more self-abased he is, the more confidence he gains. This is the meaning of God's conduct in establishing his Church. S Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For see your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that he might bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his sight."[2]

Humility of heart would be incomplete unless it continually expressed itself by petitioning God with firm confidence and childlike love. When he taught us to pray, our Lord desired that the first word addressed to him should be, "Our Father." It is not enough to obey his command by merely uttering this sweet word. We must have a firm belief in God's paternal love, and respond to it with the feelings of a truly affectionate son. We must have an ardent desire of pleasing and glorifying our heavenly Father. Now *his joy and his glory consists in seeing us acquire that moral perfection which makes us like to him.* All his commands and all his precepts have this end in view. If at times our corrupt nature revolts from obedience to his orders, we should call him to our aid. *This is his express will, and the principal object of prayer.* The Council of Trent teaches it in the words of S Augustine: "God

[1] Ps. ciii 30. [2] 1 Cor. i 26.

does not command the impossible. When he gives his orders, he expects us to do our part, and ask him for that which is beyond our strength. He then comes to our help and enables us to do what he has commanded."[1] When we ask God's assistance in this manner we are certain to be heard. Then we even become bold in our trust in him, "for hope confoundeth not."[2] It is even the measure of divine liberality. The greater our hope, the more abundantly will our hearts be filled with heavenly grace. A really humble soul understands this and trust grows with humility. Would it not be pride to doubt God's goodness, and infidelity to his promises, when united intimately to a soul whose only wish is to obey him in order to glorify him?

Here is the surest means of drawing abundant grace upon ourselves: approach God's presence with a humble and trustful heart. As this is the very essence of prayer, and as prayer is itself a grace, it seems that first of all we should ardently desire this grace and pray for it with great perseverance. Such is the advice of S Alphonsus Liguori. He ends the short treatise of which we have spoken by suggesting a petition for obtaining the grace of continual prayer. He gives another for obtaining confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ, and in the intercession of Mary. These forms are not indispensable. If we thoroughly understand the truths contained in this chapter, we will stir up in our souls a great desire for humility and confidence. And if this desire is sincere, it will find expression in fervent supplication, and we will not cease to ask repeatedly for the gift of prayer. This we shall most certainly obtain, and gradually arrive at divine union.

[1] S Aug., *De Nat. et Grat.*, c. 43. Conc. Trid., S. VI, c. 11.
[2] Rom. v 5.

CHAPTER V

THE GRACE OF PRAYER IS NOT ALWAYS GIVEN TO SOULS IN THE SAME MANNER

THIS chapter deals with a question of very great importance. From what has been said already, it is clear that prayer is a science, the knowledge of which is essential for progress in the way of perfection. We have seen that actual grace requires the co-operation of the soul with the Holy Spirit. The more complete and perfect this co-operation is, the greater will be the effects of grace. But when God honours us by wishing to unite his action with ours, it is not for us to demand it. This would be impertinence of the worst kind. Our business is to obey, and perfect submission to the impulse of the Holy Spirit will have its fruit in perfect works, which we do in communion with him. If the action of grace were imperious and irresistible, we should not have much difficulty. Such is the case in rapture and ecstasy. God then attracts the soul with such violence towards him that he does not tolerate resistance to the powerful force of his love. The soul submits to him with unrestrained delight, and for that matter has not the slightest desire of resisting him.

But it is not the same in God's ordinary dealings with the soul. It is always possible to resist actual grace. The mind is free in its exercise, and has to discern the inspiration of God in order to obey it. Here again if the action of grace were always simple and uniform, it would be easy to discern the divine inspiration. Possibly we could resist grace with bad faith, but rarely through want of knowledge. But the graces of the Holy Spirit are given to us under many different forms, and the fact is proved from the many different kinds of prayer spoken of by the saints. The first

effect of grace being to cause us to pray, if it always entered our souls by the same way and under the same conditions, there would be one invariable kind of prayer for everyone. Now this is not the case. Spiritual writers give three entirely different kinds of ordinary prayer. These are: *Meditation, affective prayer*, and the *prayer of faith* or *obscure contemplation.* The action of grace is present in the three. The Holy Spirit is there to draw the soul to himself and make it pray. But he proceeds in a different way in each kind of prayer.

In meditation the Holy Spirit influences our intellectual activities. He recalls holy thoughts to the memory. He energizes and adorns them by the work of the imagination, and he gives us a keen realization of the truths of religion. He then makes use of reflections in order to reach the heart. He arouses holy desires suitable to the thoughts he has given us, and thus perfects our prayer. The desires are changed into petitions. We adore, love and thank him, etc. Such is the prayer of meditation.

In affective prayer, the Holy Spirit suspends the need of reasoning in the intelligence, and acts directly upon the senses. He thus engenders in the soul lively sentiments of fear of his judgements, sorrow for sin, hope in his mercy, filial love, confidence, and gratitude. When the emotion is very profound it often shows itself in sighs and tears.

But all this disappears in the prayer of faith or spiritual recollection. Here the Holy Spirit has no influence whatever upon the powers of understanding or the emotions. And as these faculties, unaided by grace, are unable to produce supernatural acts, they are in a sense paralyzed and powerless to help the soul to pray. No good thought passes through the brain. The mind is empty and dark. The senses feel no emotion. Often only disgust and weariness is experienced. But at the same time the need of God is felt; he is sought in anguish, the will is drawn to him with a sweet, delightful force. An attraction such as this is clearly the work of the Holy Spirit, who is present just

as in the two first kinds of prayer. His influence is felt in a manner altogether strange of which the soul has no experience. He acts directly upon the will instead of reaching it through the intellectual and sense faculties. Instead of particular ideas, he places in the mind a simple faith in his presence, an obscure faith which without seeing him believes that God is there. The senses are not touched, but the will feels keenly the divine presence. It is certain of it, and abandoning itself willingly to this new influence of the Holy Spirit, experiences at once a profound peace. It loves and adores God with the greatest ease, by silently gazing upon him in the midst of interior darkness.

In treating of the three kinds of prayer, spiritual writers say that they correspond to three stages of the soul's progress. Meditation is the prayer of the purgative way, in which the soul is purified from its sins and corrects its faults. Affective prayer corresponds to the illuminative way. It is a time when the soul is illumined by gaining an ever-increasing knowledge of the divine wisdom, and by the practice of virtue. The prayer of faith would be that of holy souls who live habitually in the presence of God and are united to him by burning love. This is an exact correlation. Yet there are many exceptions to it. Père Joseph du Tremblay carefully remarks the fact. According to him there is no precise point of separation between the purgative, illuminative, and unitive way, nor between the states of prayer which correspond to them. The three ways and the three prayers are not passed through successively, at different epochs, after a definite period of years. Often all three are practised almost at the same time according to the influence of grace. But more time is devoted to one special form of prayer according to the soul's spiritual progress. Thus there is more meditation in the purgative way, and less in the unitive way.[1] These transitions, whether permanent or temporary, from one state of prayer to another, are facts experienced by all spiritual directors. Thus a soul just converted, who practises ordinary meditation

[1] *Méthode d'Oraison,* ii 13.

in order to purge out its vices, may have extremely vivid transports of love, and may sometimes reach the prayer of contemplation. Is not the First Commandment imposed on everyone, sinners as well as the just? Was not Mary Magdalen carried at one bound from the depths of sin to the feet of our Lord, by the ardent love which purified her soul? Then, on the other hand, souls united with God, and living in the prayer of faith, often find it possible to return to ordinary meditation which they practised at the beginning of their spiritual life, when some new aspect of a religious truth arrests their mind. In this matter the only director is the Holy Spirit, who attracts the soul to pray according to his own infinite wisdom.

But these frequent changes make it very difficult to discern with accuracy the impressions made on the soul by actual grace, in order to respond obediently to the impulse received. Souls are often deceived. They have the best possible intention of following wherever God leads them, and yet they resist him in perfect good faith. They suffer a great deal with no profit to themselves. They struggle bravely, but instead of making progress often go backwards. At times on a railway a considerable number of carriages are put midway between two locomotives, one at each end. The direction and velocity of these engines must then be perfectly regulated. If they pull against each other, the force is neutralized, and the train does not move, unless perhaps the chains burst and divide it into two parts, each of which follows its own engine. If, on the other hand, the engines push against each other, the train is in danger of being destroyed. This is an example illustrating the condition of some souls, full of ardour in the desire for union with God, but who do not know how to discern the inspirations of grace, and so resist the Holy Spirit. They, for instance, oppose their progress in perfection by devoting themselves to external penitential acts, when God is urging them to find this perfection in contempt of self and interior self-abandonment in his presence. They mortify their bodies in order to stir up sensible devotion, and puzzle

their brain in order to find holy thoughts; but the Holy Spirit is drawing them to interior silence, and to the childlike peace of complete self-surrender in the obscurity of faith and aridity of the senses. These souls are in a state of torture. They make no progress at all, and are often profoundly discouraged. If they had only learned the science of prayer, if only a good director had introduced them to the study of it, everything would change as if by magic. Souls such as these certainly deserve the greatest compassion, and it is for their sake that this little book has been written.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRAYER OF MEDITATION

INNUMERABLE books have been written on the subject of meditation. Not content with merely setting out its advantages and necessity, and offering different methods, people have composed thousands of meditations on every conceivable subject, and offer them already worked out to the piety of the faithful. We will not attempt to do this. On the contrary, we would place souls on their guard against the real danger which results from this abundance of means at their disposal.

In the first place, we must have correct ideas on this subject, and must not confuse meditation with prayer, nor think that both are of equal importance. To meditate is to make reflections. It is therefore a work of the head. To pray is to make an entreaty—that is to say, to lift up our heart to God in order to offer him our adoration and love, and make our petitions to him. Prayer, therefore, is a work of the heart, and in no sense a mental exercise. *Both of these works are united in meditation*, but they should be kept distinct, each in the place which properly belongs to it.

Now prayer is absolutely necessary for us, as we have already shown. Meditation or reflection on religious truths is also necessary. But this necessity is entirely relative, and is subordinate to the essence of prayer. In bestowing actual grace upon us, the object of the Holy Spirit is to move our heart and gain us to his love. But to reach the heart, at all events in the beginning, it is necessary to enlighten the intelligence, in order that our love may be free, rational, and worthy of him and of ourselves. Hence the need of *meditation*. It is the means by which God leads us on to

prayer. Prayer, the product of love, is the end we set ourselves to attain. David has framed this beautiful sentiment in the Psalms: "*In meditatione mea exardescet ignis:* In my meditation a fire shall flame out."[1] He says in another place: "*Ignitum eloquium tuum vehementer:* Thy word is exceedingly refined."[2]

We are commanded to love God with our whole heart. This is the first and greatest of all the commandments. If we are without this love, we must seek for it where it is to be found, in the glowing accents of Holy Writ. It is the mind which should in this way be of service to the heart. A few holy sentences should be chosen out of the sacred text, arranged as it were at the hearth of the soul, and then blown into a fiery flame by means of reflection. All this is the work of a servant. When the fire is blazing brightly, the servant goes away and leaves his master to enjoy the warmth and comfort. If the fire flickers out, the master rings the bell and asks the servant to relight it. In other words, during meditation the mind is not at work for its own sake, nor seeking for new knowledge. That it can do at any time. But during this holy exercise all its work is for the heart. It does all that is necessary to inflame the heart with love of God. All the saints insist very clearly on the work done by the mind and heart respectively in meditation. We will give a few quotations. "True wisdom," says S Bonaventure, "consists in knowing more in order to love better."[3] S Teresa says: "The progress of the soul in perfection does not consist in thinking much but in loving much." S Vincent de Paul, in exhorting his priests, said to them: "When we want a light we take a tinder box, strike it, and as soon as it flames up, we light the candle. Anyone who continued to strike the tinder after the candle had been lit would act in a most ridiculous manner. Similarly, when the soul has been enlightened by reflection, what is the use of hammering the intellect over and over again in order to increase the number of arguments and holy thoughts? Surely

[1] Ps. xxxviii 4. [2] Ps. cxviii 40.
[3] Prologue to the "Sentences."

it is a waste of time to do this when all our attention should be devoted to inflaming the will?"[1] S Francis de Sales is just as explicit: "Perhaps sometimes directly after your preparation you may find your affections greatly kindled towards God, and then I would have you yield to them without heeding any formal method, for the object of that is to excite the affections, and if the Holy Spirit gives you that warmth of affection and resolution without studied reflection, you have no need of it. In short, whenever pious affections, whether before or after reflection, are stirred up in your soul, receive and welcome them.[2]

When this great truth of the object of meditation is thoroughly understood, everything becomes easy. The value of methods set out by approved authors is properly realized, but they are used only as the need arises, as S Francis de Sales advised. These methods are means to an end. If they are of use to us, then certainly follow them; but, on the other hand, if we find them practically useless, and we have others which are to us more efficacious and fruitful, then we should leave the stereotyped methods, and follow those which lead us more directly to the desired end. No one would think of climbing a staircase step by step in order to reach the sixth floor if there was a lift provided for our use. Several spiritual writers advise us to use the same liberty as regards method, not only for meditation but also for other religious exercises when these are not regulated by the Church. Thus it would be wrong, under pretext of making a good confession or communion, to restrict oneself to the acts which are printed in prayer-books. They are useful to young people who have a quick and lively imagination, or who have not acquired the habit of recollection. But when we have once entered on the paths of prayer, books which are, as it were, the ladder of ascent should no longer be so necessary. If without their help we can hear Mass and receive the sacraments with true interior devotion,

[1] *Life* by Abelly, quoted by Saudreau, *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, I. Bk. III, 3, ii.
[2] *Devout Life*, Part II, ch. 8.

then we should have no scruple in dispensing with books.

The liberty necessary in the choice of method should also exist in selecting a subject for meditation. Mark the words of the learned Jesuit, Père Surin, on this subject: "The subjects which are suitable to different souls vary according to the particular attraction of each one. Numbers of good people make the great mistake of wishing to follow their meditation books in every detail like beginners, adhering strictly to the thoughts and affections which are suggested to them, although very often they do not suit their inclinations, nor satisfy their needs in any way. When animals are attached to a pillar they can only go as far as their chain stretches, and pace about wearily. In the same way these persons are tied down to a certain number of points, to which they are so firmly attached that it is pitiable to see them. We would not say that the visitor was on familiar terms with his host who always prepared three points when he came to see him, and did not dare to depart from them. It would be a ceaseless torment to him to restrict his conversation to the matter which he had prepared beforehand. But real friendship demands that after you have finished your business, if you have any to do, you should converse freely and affectionately, and take advantage of your friend's goodness to follow out any topic suggested."[1]

S Teresa advises us to make use of meditation to place ourselves in the company of our Lord, and reflect on him in the state corresponding to our own feelings at the time. When full of joy, meditate on his resurrection; if sorrowful, join him in the Garden of Olives, and so on.[2]

In communities, where prayer is made in common, the subject of meditation which has been read out aloud should be listened to respectfully. If it touches our heart, so much the better, and we shall derive much profit by meditating on the subject proposed for our consideration. But if it does not appeal to us, then do not trouble about it; freely choose some different

[1] Saudreau, *ibid.* [2] *Way of Perfection*, c. 27.

subject. It would be absurd to do otherwise, and a superior who insisted on it would be acting in a tyrannical manner. It is right, of course, for people in religion to be kept fervent and faithful to prayer, but it is wrong to make them enkindle the flame of love in their hearts by forcing ice upon them. Those living in the world should likewise use the greatest liberty in the choice of time, place, and other means. Whether they pray in the morning, afternoon, or evening; whether they do so in their homes, at church, or in the open field; whether they use books, images or crucifix, does not matter very much. The essential thing is that they do it faithfully and fervently. Everything else is secondary. Let everyone choose the means which succeed best with him, even though other people find these means unsuitable.

CHAPTER VII

DANGERS OF THE MIND IN MEDITATION

We said in the previous chapter that the mind should be the servant of the heart. Unfortunately it is often a very bad servant. We should be on our guard if we want our meditations to be fruitful in result. This prudent warning is a very necessary preparation for prayer, and the Church herself reminds us of it. The breviary contains a prayer to be recited before divine office in which we specially ask God to keep our heart free from the dangers to which we are liable. "Lord," we say, "open thou my lips to bless thy holy name. Cleanse also my heart from all vain, wicked, and unbecoming thoughts." Among these kinds of thoughts which are hurtful to prayer, vain thoughts are certainly the most dangerous. They occupy the first place in prayer. Evil thoughts are naturally repugnant to holy souls, and they will not harbour them for one moment. Unbecoming thoughts, although they are not bad in themselves, are clearly distractions which are most unsuited to the mind at the moment of prayer. There is a proper time for everything. S Bernard when he entered choir had every reason for saying to his soul: "Leave there at the door all thy business matters, and resume them again on thy departure. But thou, my soul, enter alone into the sanctuary of the Lord in order to abandon thyself entirely to his love."

But the danger of vain thoughts is not quite so manifest. These are good thoughts and seem quite suitable for meditation, and no one is inclined to suspect them. In fact, their only fault is that they are vain—that is to say, useless. They foster no love in the heart, but merely amuse the mind and waste much time. They are of many kinds, and perhaps it would be useful to enumerate them.

The first is self-contemplation made under pretext of examination of conscience. S Francis de Sales gives a good description of it which shows very well how ridiculous it is. "Such," he says, "are these everlasting considerations and reflections on our own selves, when we want to think what our thoughts are, consider our considerations, gaze upon what we have seen, discover what we have discovered; they throw the soul into a tortuous maze which takes away all the rectitude of our actions, and saps up all the goodness from our piety. The prayer of such people is a trouble to them even in the prayer itself, for they leave its sweet enticements in order to see what progress they have made, whether they are really content, whether their state is really tranquil, whether they are in a real state of quiet; they are never occupied with God, but always worried about their own feelings."[1] Bossuet completes the description. "There is," he says, "a very great difference between holy reflections which inspire us with the love of God, and the ceaseless return upon ourselves which is the source of self-love. In the former, the soul which is possessed of God alone thinks of its own actions only for the purpose of directing them towards God. In the latter its sole pleasure is in self-contemplation. The soul wishes to be able to say: I am praying, I am occupied with God; whereas in reality this is only a pretext for self-satisfaction, and self-glorification in doing good, instead of giving all the credit to God."[2] Alas for this self-contemplation, this self-examination, this soul-sifting, this feeling of one's pulse, and all for the ostensible purpose of knowing oneself better! What a fatal illusion it all is! How many souls are ensnared into it full of self-love! Of course, we must examine our conscience for real, palpable faults, in order to lament them and prevent a recurrence by making good, practical resolutions. But if we have a thousand faults, and we finally arrive at an accurate knowledge

[1] *Love of God*, VI. Quoted by Bossuet, *Sur l'oraison mentale*, v 9.
[2] *Ibid.*, v. 10.

of them all, what will be the use of it? Be assured of this. The hand of God is alone sufficiently delicate to search and pluck out the smallest roots of evil in our weak nature. Do we wish to know our wretchedness at once and be delivered from it? Instead of self-contemplation, gaze upon God, and beseech him to do that work in us of which we are incapable. He will do so by helping us to lose ourselves more and more in his love. Our miseries are nothing else but the innumerable fibres of self-love. The destruction of self-love consists in the love of God carried to the complete forgetfulness of self.

The second kind of useless thought consists in *intellectual curiosity*, penetrating into mysteries, under pretext of admiring their beauty. This curiosity exalts pride of intellect and dries up the heart. It is at least a waste of time if nothing else. "Amuse not yourself with useless subtleties and lofty imaginings," said S Francis de Sales. In entering on this way, we leave prayer behind and change meditation into study. It is the temptation of preachers, professors of theology, and superiors whose business it is to give spiritual conferences. They think they must prepare themselves in this way in order to instruct others. They prepare an interesting and amusing discourse, but neglect to accumulate by means of prayer those treasures of love which would reach the hearts of their hearers. When people who are not properly instructed give way to this mental curiosity, they are exposed to the danger of falling into serious theological errors. S John of the Cross had once to examine a soul who was believed to be very advanced in the ways of prayer. She used to meditate on the Blessed Eucharist, and the saint discovered absolute heresy in the account which she gave of her reflections. In our own days a priest who was the confessor of the Abbess of Lavaur admired so much the thoughts of this religious during prayer, that he wrote them down and had them printed. The book was soon put on the Index. These facts show the value of the meditations of the Abbess and the person examined by S John of the Cross, and we would ask

the curious minded to learn a lesson from their example. Finally, there is a very great danger in useless thoughts, when souls imagine that they have received *direct instructions* from God during meditation. If we would believe their account, God speaks to them, instructs, counsels, and even commands them. They end by wishing to make their superiors and confessors obey these supposed expressions of the divine Will, which have been communicated to them during prayer. Volumes could be written on this subject. S John of the Cross has demonstrated at great length the danger of true revelations, and the necessity of never following them out in practice without the formal command of superiors. How, then, are we to treat revelations which are purely imaginary, and take their rise in a diseased brain? Rash people, drawn to such illusions without mistrust, quickly fall into ruin. They either lose their vocation, or act in a most imprudent manner, or lose their reason entirely and end their days in an asylum. What humility and simplicity of mind we should have in our conversation with God! He does not ask for our intellect but for our heart. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of men, that they are vain."[1] When he taught his Apostles how to pray, he gave them this advice: "And when you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard. Be not you therefore like to them, for your Father knoweth what is needful for you, before you ask him."[2] You have nothing to teach him, but you have to reach his heart by trust and humility. Acting in conformity with this rule, our Lord never did or said anything to excite the mental curiosity of his Apostles. On the contrary, he often opposed their desire for useless knowledge. He calmed their understanding in order to speak more directly to their heart, and gain their attention and love. The whole discourse after the Last Supper is one long outpouring of tender affection: "I will not now call you servants . . . but I have called you friends."[3] He ended his words with a stirring exhorta-

[1] Ps. xciii 11. [2] Matt. vi 7, 8. [3] John xv 15.

tion to prayer. We should not, then, prepare for meditation by a great intellectual effort, but by abandoning ourselves to God with a simple, sincere, and heartfelt affection.

We will conclude by giving Père Surin's severe criticism of those writers who lay altogether too much stress on the work of the intellect during meditation: "We must correct the false ideas we have acquired, and especially the notion that the working out of beautiful ideas in prayer is proper to learned men, and tenderness of heart and shedding of tears only possible in highly-strung women."[1] Later on he adds: "Those who are not much advanced in charity, and yet are very learned men, find it necessary to engage in much reasoning from the very constitution of their minds, and when they are deprived of it are unable to restrain their dryness of spirit. . . . If, on the contrary, they succeed in having many pleasant thoughts during prayer, they are extremely happy, and think that in their whole life they have never experienced anything better. They preach their manner of praying to others, and cannot praise it too highly, and any other method they regard as fanciful and unreal. Unfortunately they do not see that they have never given up their will entirely to God, and have never been really near to him. They are bound by their sacred calling to devote much time to their neighbours' good; but not maintaining that detachment which is necessary in all exterior things, their life is a medley of good and indifferent actions. If they would only humble themselves in their understanding, they would then perhaps receive the grace of perfect interior prayer."[2] He had said previously, in chapter v of Book II of the same treatise: "Most men wish to satisfy their reason, and follow the same path in the science of mysticism as they do in that of philosophy and theology; but there is another way which is reached by what S Ignatius calls '*scholam affectus*'—that is to say, 'the school of affection,' 'the school of love,' or, in the words of Bossuet, 'the school of the heart.'"

[1] *Love of God*, II, ix. [2] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER VIII

AFFECTIVE PRAYER

In order to attract us and unite us freely to himself by the ardent love of the will, the Holy Spirit exerts his influence on all our natural faculties. He turns, in the first place, to our understanding, which we have just been considering. Love is impossible without knowledge, and if we wish to know his perfections and his works, we must take the trouble to study them. The work of the mind, then, is a necessary preparation for prayer. But this mental exercise has a certain danger, as we pointed out in the previous chapter. It should be moderated, and there may even be a time when it should be stopped altogether, in order to leave the heart free to give itself up entirely to the *love* of God. Sometimes with people of well-balanced natures, who walk without swerving from the path before them, the working of the intellect ceases of its own accord after a sufficiently long period of meditation. The mind is excited to activity by the new discoveries it makes in its studies. But when it has probed a subject to its depths so that it knows it almost by heart, and every aspect has been looked at over and over again and there is nothing new to examine, its curiosity is satisfied and it seeks for satisfaction elsewhere. When old people who have lost their memory relate the same story over and over again, their listeners become utterly bored. It is exactly the same with souls of the best possible intentions, who are condemned to meditate unceasingly on the same religious truths. On the other hand, if the soul has made a practical application of the fundamental principle of meditation, and has reflected only in order to love, then its love of God is developed more and more. It becomes strong and hardy. This results from the essential difference there is between

the needs of the mind and those of the heart. The first is ever seeking for something new, the second is distrustful of novelty. Moreover, when the soul is beginning to devote itself to prayer, a great deal of mental reflection is necessary in order to make it understand the goodness of God, and decide to love him even timidly. But when it advances in knowledge this reticence disappears, and much greater love is reached, although a far shorter time is given to consideration.

Thus the passage from meditation to affective prayer comes about almost imperceptibly. The mind never entirely ceases to work, but it becomes more simple in its action. Instead of engaging in much lengthy reasoning on a truth of religion, the mind comprehends it in a general way which is sufficient to touch the heart, and enflame it with love. Thus progress is made in the way pointed out by S Teresa in a work quoted later on. "Progress," she says, "consists not in thinking much but in loving much." We begin to enter on this way of perfection with affective prayer. We think less and less, but our love grows stronger and stronger. Sometimes God is pleased to draw souls to him by acting immediately on the affections, without passing through the medium of the understanding. This is of very frequent occurrence according to Père Libermann. "Although meditation," he says, "leads gradually to affective prayer, this fact does not prevent a *great many* souls from beginning at this stage without ever having applied themselves to meditation."[1] God, of course, has every right to dispense with halting-places; he can do it quite easily and even with great profit to souls who are so favoured. He generally acts in this way with simple folk, whose unaffected faith never feels the need of theological reasoning. When people of this kind become holy they practise affective prayer at once. Well-educated people who love much but have no taste for theological speculation, very quickly arrive at affective prayer. Reflection and reasoning soon tires them out, but, on the contrary, they feel very keenly the need

[1] *Écrits*, p. 149.

of loving our Lord, and are never weary of offering to him their deepest affection. There is nothing wrong or disquieting about this fact. The Holy Spirit accommodates himself to each one's nature, and thus makes it more easy for us to correspond with the action of grace. However necessary the knowledge of religious truth may be, not all the faithful are called to be theologians. But they are bound, on the other hand, to love God with their whole heart, and if they can arrive quickly at this love without going through a great amount of intellectual effort, why should we stop them? It would be to oppose the action of the Holy Spirit. For if this facility of some people for affective prayer is due in a measure to their natural inclinations, the influence of grace is there also without the slightest doubt. Affective prayer is a great advance on meditation, but at the same time it is very far from being perfect. Here also there are pitfalls, and it is often difficult to know how to avoid them. We will call attention to the chief of them.

The first and most dangerous consists in exaggerating sense emotion, and supposing the whole perfection of prayer to consist in the vividness of these feelings. The exact opposite is true. God, of course, acts upon our feelings, not in order to develop them unduly, but to detach and separate our will from them. We are living a life of sense gratification. The Holy Spirit is obliged to come and seek us on the plane in which we are situated. For this very reason he descends to our level. We are crying out for sense emotion of a base and often wicked character, and he accordingly produces pure and delightful emotions in us, by means of grace, which turn us from the earth and direct our desires to heaven. "God is a Spirit," our Lord said to the Samaritan woman; "and they that adore him must adore him in spirit and in truth."[1] The sensible outpourings of our love have something corporeal about them. In that respect they bear some resemblance to the animal oblations offered of old in the Temple of Jerusalem. God has little taste for these

[1] John iv 24.

sacrifices. He prefers the spiritual craving of our will to the emotions of our senses; this is adoration in spirit, and when it is proved sincere by showing itself in virtuous actions, this is adoration in truth. We have met a person entirely absorbed in an excess of affective prayer. She came every morning to the church at an early hour, and gave herself up entirely to pious emotions. Often she would shed tears. She would remain on her knees from six in the morning to nine or ten o'clock. Her director had sent her away, saying: "I do not understand the state of your soul; go and seek advice from some other priest." She came to me, and I was not long in showing her that she did not know how to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit. I taught her not to destroy the purity and force of the grace of prayer, by wearying herself in trying to give material expression to the sentiments of her heart. Far better to spiritualize them by causing them to ascend to the will, and find expression in purely interior acts. She was docile and intelligent, and she understood and changed her mode of prayer. It was a complete transformation of her life. Far from losing the inclination and taste for prayer, she soon arrived at a state of continual prayer. Previously she prayed in an unintelligent and unfruitful manner. She did no good work herself, but was satisfied in giving money for charitable and religious purposes. Once she was delivered from this excessive sense devotion she soon undertook the most difficult tasks. She displayed a courageous ardour which approached almost to heroism, remaining at the same time always cheerful, calm, and self-composed. Her former friends could not conceal their astonishment; so quick a change passed their understanding. The one thing which effected it was the clear notion this soul had acquired of the nature of the Holy Spirit's activity in prayer. By responding submissively to his smallest influence, an enormous change had been worked in her soul, and much progress made. Without falling into excessive sensible devotion as this person did, we should be on our guard against another pitfall which is none the less

dangerous. It is to imagine we have made sufficient progress in affective prayer when we have felt great sentiments of love for almighty God. Left at that it would be of very little value as prayer, for the mere sentiments by themselves do not constitute a formal petition, and to pray is to make petitions. We must do so humbly, and also add to our petition all the different conditions which are necessary to make it efficacious. This is the only means of obtaining from God the graces we need in order to practise virtue. Whether we practise meditation or affective prayer, petitions should always accompany it; otherwise we run the risk of leaving our work unfinished and imperfect.

Speaking of reflections, during meditation on the commandments of God and the virtues and vices, S Alphonsus speaks as follows: "What is the advantage of knowing what we ought to do, and yet not doing it—unless to make us more blameworthy in God's eyes? Read and meditate as much as we will, we shall never fulfil our obligations unless we ask God for the grace to do so."[1] This is a commentary on S Augustine's sentence: "*Melius est orare quam legere:* Prayer is better than reading and meditation." The same consideration is applicable to the sentiments we experience in affective prayer. S Alphonsus perceived this also, and gives the advice of Père Segneri for our instruction. He used to say of himself: "At first during meditation I devoted myself more to producing affections than to praying. . . . But later on, when I realized the necessity and great utility of prayer, I devoted the best part of the time during my meditation to the prayer of supplication."[2] S Teresa taught the same doctrine in a letter to her brother Lawrence: "It is one thing to desire the grace of devotion, and quite another thing to ask God for it."

[1] *The Chief Means of Prayer*, I, ii, § 4. [2] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER IX

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

MEDITATION carefully practised leads on to affective prayer. This in its turn leads just as surely to the prayer of faith. The grace of prayer generally terminates here, for it has then reached the degree of ordinary perfection. Beyond that point prayer becomes extraordinary and miraculous. It is necessary to treat of the prayer of faith at length and with great clearness. As a matter of fact, the majority of ascetical writers say nothing whatever about it; and a further trouble is that those who do speak about it often use inexact and sometimes erroneous terminology, resulting in great harm to souls who are called to this kind of prayer.[1]

First to explain the nature of it. We have seen that *the grace of prayer* is in the first place given to the understanding, and then takes hold of the feelings, and ends by directing the will towards God. This is meditation. In affective prayer this grace scarcely reaches the intelligence at all, but acts directly upon the sense faculties. It stirs up vivid emotions which draw the will towards God, and inflame it with a burning affection of charity. But when a soul is drawn to the prayer of faith, the Holy Spirit inspires no special idea in the intellect, and excites no emotion in the senses. He goes directly to the will and attracts it, revealing his presence to the soul by the light of faith directed towards the highest point of the intelligence, without stirring up the imagination or the lower faculties. Feeling itself thus near to God, the will keenly

[1] In a matter which is so obscure and little known it is impossible to give a full explanation in one phrase. If the reader only half understands our words or perhaps not at all, he should continue to read quietly on without mental exhaustion. The first part will be explained by what follows. He will soon see everything clearly, and then, if trouble is taken to read the more difficult parts over again, he will understand what at first appeared unintelligible.

perceives the need of loving him, and of entire self-abandonment into his hands. Three things take place at the moment of this prayer. First, the mind is roughly stricken, as it were, with a kind of paralysis. It is powerless to devote itself to things divine, or have any experience of them. Before the moment of prayer there was plenty of intellectual vigour. It was a pleasure to study the truths of religion. But now when the soul desires to pray, there is not one thought forthcoming. It has to confess with David: "*Ut jumentum factus sum apud te:* I am become as a beast before thee."[1] Secondly, the same phenomenon appears in the senses. The heart is absolutely dry. Far from experiencing sweet, delightful emotions which direct it towards God, it more often feels only aversion and disgust. David had passed through this state when he said: "In the sanctuary have I come before thee, to see thy power and thy glory, and now I am in a desert land where there is no way, and no water."[2] But the will, on the other hand, is strongly attracted towards God. It feels the need of him; it has no peace except in adhering to him. Thus did David rest even in the desert sanctuary. He confessed his utter dullness of intellect which made him like an animal and then adds: "*Et ego semper tecum:* And I am always with thee. I do not wish to depart from thee under the pretext of having nothing to say." This paralysis of mind and heart is only in regard to God. The soul is absolutely unable to frame any good thought or sentiment to help the will to pray. But the heart and mind are by no means powerless with regard to creatures. On the contrary, the imagination often runs at random, and the senses feel attracted to earthly things; the will alone is drawn towards God.

When these three signs are found together, it is impossible to have any doubt. The Holy Spirit is present, and bestowing the grace of prayer, but not in the same way as before. If the soul, deceived by erroneous teaching, wishes to return at whatever cost to one of these previous methods, it resists the Holy Spirit. It

[1] Ps. lxxii 7. [2] Ps. lxii 3.

neglects the grace offered, and spends its energies in waste, seeking to frame some good thought in the mind, or stir up some pious feeling in the heart. S Paul has said: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves (to make us pray); but our sufficiency is from God."[1] Prayer being the effect of actual grace, when the Holy Spirit bestows it directly on the will, it is foolish to try and seek it somewhere else. Previously he offered this grace to the intellectual and sensitive faculties, and it was right to receive it by making these faculties do their proper work. But when it is his pleasure no longer to bestow it on these faculties, but to favour the will with this grace instead, then we must remain calm and peaceful, and content to make the will respond to the divine action. This is the only course to follow, so much the worse for the ordinary methods. The Holy Spirit is the Master and we must obey him. He asks simply for our will, unadorned with good thoughts and sensible devotion; let us, then, give up our will to him. Be united with him by obscure faith in his presence, by one glance full of love, submission and utter abandonment. Remain peacefully in this state. It is a prayer, and a most excellent one. Shall we refuse God the right to make his action felt directly on the substance of the soul which he created? Shall we compel him to pass previously through the different faculties in order to reach this substance? Our Lord has promised: "If any one love me . . . my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him."[2] S Paul also has said repeatedly: We are the temples of God and the Holy Spirit dwells in us. And since this is the fact, what is God to do in us? Shall we compel him to cause death? How unbecoming the Sovereign Majesty who is infinite life, power, wisdom, and goodness! And if God is in us to do all things necessary for our sanctification, shall we force him to act as creatures do, who being outside of us must necessarily pass through the external faculties in order to reach our inmost being? If this is so, God would be within

[1] 2 Cor. iii 5. [2] John xiv 23.

us to no purpose. Whenever he wished to bestow upon us the grace of prayer, he would have to depart from us and act from without. Is he not omnipotent? And if, instead of acting from without, he attracts us from within our very being in order to draw us near to him by a love entirely spiritual, shall we be so foolish as to resist?

In this prayer, says Père Surin, "the soul knows what God is; she even tastes him by a divine touch of which the mystics speak, a supernatural motion by which the soul knows what God is, not because she has seen him, but because she has touched him. For touch is the most delicate among the senses of the spirit, though in bodily things it is the grossest. A more exquisite and close perception of God is acquired by this experience than by any other way. It is what S Paul wished to express when preaching on the Areopagus: 'That they should seek God, if haply they may feel after him or find him, although he be not far from every one of us.'"[1]

L'Abbé Saudreau, who is singularly competent to speak on these matters, does not like the expression *contact of substances*. He only allows this contact between the soul and the Divinity in very rare and miraculous instances. His theory on the subject may be found in *La vie d'union*, pp. 568-571. His argument would be more convincing if he had explained the manner in which the Holy Spirit acts during the ordinary prayer of faith. When God exercises his influence upon us with the help of images and species, whether natural or supernatural, our faculties are set in motion. The mind makes reflections. In visions it is enriched by knowledge of a different and higher character than ordinary cognition. But when God leaves these powers untouched in order to act directly upon the will, what is his manner of action then? If we confine ourselves to the teaching of S John of the Cross, this manner of action is by contact of substance with substance. In *The Living Flame of Love*, he says: "This burning is the touch of the Divinity on

[1] Acts xvii 27. *Love of God*, III, vi.

the inmost substance of the soul without form or figure, either natural, formal, or imaginary."[1] The Saint expressed the same thing in *The Spiritual Canticle*, stanza xix, at the verse, "Let thy face shine on the mountains": "The Bride prays to see the face of God, which is the essential communication of his Divinity to the soul, without any intervening medium, by a certain knowledge thereof in the Divinity. This is something beyond sense, and divested of accidents, inasmuch as it is *the contact of pure substances*, that is, of the soul and the Divinity."[2] His meaning can be seen from these two quotations. If the intermediate forms or created species, whether natural or supernatural, are removed, God produces his action upon the soul by means of an immediate contact of substance with substance. Such contacts may have infinite variations among themselves. Some cause a weak love of God in the soul and are extremely slight. Others are more profound. In the language of S John of the Cross, they inflict a great wound of love, a burning fire, upon the soul. It was this that made S Francis cry out: "Love has set me on fire; love has set me on fire: *In fuoco l' amor mi mise; in fuoco l' amor mi mise.*" But although there is a difference of degree and intensity between these two extremes of touch, there is no essential difference. Thus, l'Abbé Saudreau calls attention to the variety of objects in contemplation in order to throw doubt upon the reality of these substantial contacts. He seems to think that if the prayer of faith is caused by a contact of substance, the subject of prayer must necessarily be the presence of God in the soul. This does not appeal to us as an inevitable conclusion. For if in meditation speculative knowledge precedes love, in contemplation love precedes this kind of knowledge. Now to produce this love there can be nothing so efficacious as a contact of substances, a caress, an embrace. For this purpose the divine touch has an enormous power, as it is written:

[1] Complete works, trans. by David Lewis (Longmans, 1864), II, p. 238.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

"The Lord thy God is a consuming fire."[1] As soon as he touches us, he burns us with his love more or less ardently according to the force of his attachment. But love is essentially free in operation. It may use its liberty to contemplate God as it pleases, according to the attraction of the moment. It may contemplate God in himself, in his creation, in the blessed Eucharist, the Passion, or in any other aspect. It may consider as it pleases either the justice or goodness of God, or any other attribute. The diversity of objects contemplated has no effect on the source of love which causes contemplation. Since this love takes its rise spontaneously in the heart without any intellectual exertion, there seems no reason why it should not be attributed to the touch of the Divinity. Operations which follow on the grace which produced contemplative love cannot be said to affect the nature of this grace.[2]

The teaching set out in this chapter on the prayer of faith, and the following chapters, is not the mere imagining of mystical writers. It is the result of observation upon what has passed in their own souls or in those of their disciples. We are in the sphere of facts of experience. It is impossible to question the authenticity of facts, when attested by innumerable witnesses, who have made most careful inquiries, and whose character is worthy of the utmost confidence. Thousands of souls have sanctified themselves in prayer ever since the day of Pentecost when the spirit of prayer was poured out upon the Church, and many have given a complete account of the way in which they were united to God during prayer. The result of their testimony makes it certain that the prayer of faith has always been common among holy people. We will give the proof of this later on. But first we must continue to explain more fully the nature of this prayer, and this will be the object of the two following chapters.

[1] Deut. iv 24.

[2] This question of contact of substances is a delicate philosophical problem which we have no intention of discussing at great length. We think it best to quote the passages from Père Surin and S John of the Cross, and leave everyone free to interpret them in his own way.

CHAPTER X

DIFFERENT NAMES OF THE PRAYER OF FAITH

The prayer of faith has had the good or bad fortune to be called by a great number of different names. This fact is due to its mysterious nature. In the first place, it is not easy to understand the precise nature of it. Further, in order to explain it more accurately, the saints have given it the name which best corresponds with their manner of thinking and the dispositions of their disciples. Hence we have a great variety of names to explain what is in reality one and the same thing. This confuses the superficial mind. But serious reflective minds find this variety extremely helpful for arriving more quickly at an accurate knowledge of this very delicate subject. We will enumerate these different significations of the one identical thing, and add a short explanation to each.

It would be waste of time to say much more on the term *prayer of faith*, since this has already been explained sufficiently. The word "faith" is taken in a general sense. "It is," says Bossuet, "a simple glance, a loving regard or attention towards some divine object. The soul leaves reasoning behind, and is satisfied with a delightful contemplation, which keeps it peaceful and attentive, and ready to receive the divine operation and impression communicated to it by the Holy Spirit; it does little and receives much; its work is delightful, yet most productive; and as it draws nearer and nearer to the source of every light, and grace, and virtue, these gifts are bestowed upon it with still greater abundance."[1]

Next to the term "prayer of faith" the most common is *contemplation*, to which the word *obscure* is often added. "Contemplation" is used as a contrast to "reasoning," "analysis," "reflection," etc. Instead of regarding an object with searching attention to

[1] *Manière Courte.*

every detail, we take it all in at one glance, and remain fixed and motionless with admiration. Thus no special reflection or reasoning is made in contemplation, whether upon God, Jesus Christ, or any other object of religion. God is there, and we gaze upon him in the obscurity of faith. This is enough for the understanding, and whatever further labour there is belongs to the will. It is called *obscure* contemplation precisely because no ray of light is seen. We speak to God often by a glance full of reverence and love. "Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, you are present in my soul. I believe it though I do not seek to look upon you. You see me and listen to my prayer, and that is enough. Permit my heart to offer its love and adoration," etc. The prayer continues in this way, generally without framing any set phrase, by the tranquil motions of the heart which surrenders itself with unceasing repetition into the hands of its God. If Jesus Christ or the Blessed Virgin is the object of contemplation, the process is just the same. We look upon Jesus Christ on the cross, in the crib, in the holy Eucharist. We gaze upon Mary in God or God in Mary. But it is a simple gaze free from all curiosity; we do not seek for details. It is an act of faith in the presence of him who should be the Master of our souls. What is the meaning of this obscurity into which we are plunged? We are not seeking for knowledge but for love; and the dark shadows of night are more favourable for love than the blazing light of the sun. The prayer of faith, then, is very aptly called "obscure contemplation."

A loving attention to the presence of God is another term by which it is sometimes signified. Here "attention" must be understood in the light of the foregoing explanations. God is not seen, and the soul is united to him, not by a curious searching of the intellect, but by a loving attention of the will. When friends embrace, they remain for a long time in each other's arms if they love each other very much. We do the same with almighty God by prolonging the embrace of our love for him.

The prayer of faith is known also as the *prayer of recollection*. This does not mean exterior *recollection*, which is essential for every kind of prayer, even for meditation, but interior recollection. S Teresa describes this prayer at great length in the *Way of Perfection*. She says that "all the powers of the soul are then recollected." If the feeling of the divine presence is shared at once by the will, the heart, and the mind, the recollection is then complete and most delightful. All our faculties, like bees, enter, as it were, into the hive and feed upon the honey. The soul, detached from creatures and lost in God, experiences in him the excess of happiness. But in ordinary contemplation, it is not within our power to give calm and recollection to the inferior faculties in this way. The will alone has the power of detaching itself from all that passes through the senses, and from all the workings of the mind. It draws apart and is hidden in the bosom of God, ascending to the higher part of the soul upon the very summit of the intelligence, and remains with him there in the deepest solitude. At the same time the *recollection* which is thus described by S Teresa is very often little more than affective prayer.

The words *repose* and *quiet* also express what is meant by the prayer of faith. As with *recollection*, there is here meant a general repose of all our faculties, when the soul is in a state of complete rest, entirely absorbed in the delights of divine love. If carried to such a degree as to last for a great length of time, this state approaches the miraculous, and we will speak of it later on. But there is an ordinary prayer of quiet where the soul is only in partial repose—that is, in the will alone. The other faculties are left in their natural state and liable to very strong temptation. But when the will is submissive to the grace of prayer which the Holy Spirit offers to it, it experiences a feeling of great interior peace. "Peace to men of good will,"[1] the angels sang at our Lord's nativity. Job said, on the contrary: "Who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?"[2] Peace of soul consists entirely in this secret:

[1] Luke ii 14. [2] Job ix 4.

to obey God and be led by him in all things with childlike docility.) When the will during obscure contemplation abandons itself to God entirely and unreservedly, the peace resulting is not only good but perfect. The soul at once enters into the profoundest repose, and continues in a state of quiet even when the mind is harassed and wearied with distraction, and the senses are the prey of dryness and disgust. S Jane Frances de Chantal, explaining the prayer practised by the Sisters of the Visitation, said: "It is a prayer of simple unity and unique simplicity in the presence of God, by an entire self-abandonment to his holy Will, and to the care of his Divine Providence." The prayer of faith is simply that, and nothing else. It is a simple gaze fixed upon God present in the soul, together with complete surrender into his hands, by an unbounded love and childlike trust. S Jane Frances de Chantal's description of the prayer of faith is in complete agreement with the meaning of the other terms given in this chapter. The name varies, but the thing is identical.

There is one final name—*mystical theology*—which will be explained in Chapter XII. An altogether erroneous observation of a modern writer compels us to deal with it at some length. According to him, obscure contemplation or the prayer of faith would be exclusively on the side of the will, but not of the intellect at all, for, says he, if we do not thresh out a subject by meditation, scarcely any fresh knowledge at all is acquired during prayer, and we can hardly expect God to supply the deficiency. He does not come to our side like a master to teach new truths, but is content with assisting us to recall to our memory truths already acquired. At the same time, adds this author, the prayer of faith is a very excellent prayer, since we are able to receive fresh instruction at other times. We see that there is a certain amount of truth in this observation. But as we are about to enter into the sphere of mysticism, it is absolutely necessary to give at once some explanation of the terminology employed in this science.

CHAPTER XI

SOME NECESSARY EXPLANATIONS

"We pronounce the same articulate words," Mme. Swetchine used to say, "but we do not speak the same language. For instance, a servant announces to his master that a young man desires to speak with him. 'Who is it?' the master says, 'and where is his card?' The servant returns and says: 'The young man has no card, but apparently he comes from *a hospice*.' 'Well, show him in.' The young man comes in and says on presenting himself: 'I have come to see you under the *auspices* of your friend.'" If the visitor had given a printed card to the servant, the mistake would have been prevented by the difference in spelling between the two words "hospice" and "auspice." But how many words there are which are spelt in the same way, yet mean entirely different things. In order to understand an author's meaning, it is necessary to know the precise signification which he attaches to the words used. Otherwise we run the risk of making him say things he never meant, and quite misunderstanding his ideas. The further a science is removed from the comprehension of the masses, the more need there is for a terminology which can determine the diverse elements of its composition by specific words. The science of medicine and chemistry is an example of this. If there were no special vocabulary, it would be continually necessary to have recourse to involved phrases and lengthy descriptions, which would result in a heavy style of literature, and would even be prejudicial to clearness. Now mysticism is of this nature. It is not a popular study. It deals with human acts which very rarely occur, and if these acts are not described in precise terms having a special signification, it would be a very difficult matter to have any true and accurate ideas on the subject at all.

We will give an account of these terms, by comparing the interior acts of contemplation with those produced during the lower kinds of prayer. But before doing so, a short analysis of the ordinary operations of the soul will be very helpful for better understanding the nature of contemplation. It is a philosophic axiom that every act of the will is preceded by an act of cognition: *Nil volitum nisi praecognitum.* Now there are many kinds of cognition which exercise an influence on this faculty. The first and the least spiritual is that which comes from the senses. This is the cognition of children before they come to the use of reason. They want to take hold of everything which pleases the sight, and eat everything which tempts the appetite. This cognition is not very different from animal instinct. It produces acts which, being devoid of reason, are not yet human acts. We speak of them, however, because sense-cognition continues even after the development of reason. It excites in us appetites which often captivate the will, although they may be contrary to reason. Midway between sense-cognition and purely intellectual cognition, there is that which comes from the imagination. This faculty influences in turn both the body and the mind. Combining images and other natural sense-impressions, it endeavours to captivate the will by representing manifold impressions in order to allure it. It is a fruitful source of illusion and sin. Beyond the imagination there is reason. This faculty examines ideas, probes into their meaning and co-ordinates them, draws conclusions, and frames arguments. It is reason which should regulate the acts of the will in conformity with the law of God. Unfortunately it is ever allowing itself to be blinded by criminal passions, which induce the will to do what is evil. Faith aids reason by enlightening it with truths revealed by God. But even this illumination, when presented in a distinct manner before the reason for examination, can be obscured by reflections suggested by the desires of the flesh, and the wanderings of the imagination. Finally, beyond the senses, imagination, and reason by which the soul

is enriched with particular cognitions, there is a higher understanding which is known as *the summit or highest point of the intelligence.* This contemplates ideas in their simplicity and purity, without analysing them in any way. It contemplates them in their entirety at one simple gaze, and if they are good it admires them, and excites the will to desire them. Such is, so to speak, the mechanism of human acts, and the relation between intellect and will. The soul acquires new knowledge by three intellectual faculties which may be called "inferior," and one "superior" faculty or "apex of the spirit," which is the very intelligence itself. The will determines itself to act in accordance with the light which comes to it through one of these four channels.

With these preliminary observations we will return to our consideration of mysticism. What does God do in order to attract us to himself? He stands at the door of our soul and knocks. "*Ecce sto ad ostium et pulso.*"[1] If we open to him, he urges us to think of him, and to love him, and bend our will to his, that he may lead us to eternal happiness. It is this divine stirring of our soul which constitutes the grace of prayer. As we said above in Chapter III, the infinite mercy of God offers this grace freely to all men. Many resist his call and refuse to open to him the gate, but our concern is not with these souls at the present moment. Others, happily, receive this grace with perfect docility. What then comes to pass? There is another philosophic axiom: *Quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur;* that is to say, "The thing contained takes the shape of the thing which contains it." Liquid poured into a round or square vessel takes one or other of these shapes. Now among those who correspond with the grace of prayer, many live by the senses. Their will is, so to speak, chained down to the sense emotions of their nature. For these, the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has the ceremonial of her external worship. She increases the number of ceremonies, chants, musical services, pic-

[1] Apoc. iii 20.

tures, and buildings of marvellous architecture, in order to lift up to God the minds and hearts of those who are sensible to impressions of this kind.

Here is the first kind of prayer. When souls have had experience of these things, and have become habitually used to them, God leads them to a higher kind of prayer. He became incarnate so as to be seen by us and be our model. It is our duty to reflect on his life and imitate it in our own, after the example of S Paul, who said: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ."[1] Here the senses give place to the imagination. It is the imagination which, reproducing in us the example of God made man, and following him from the crib to the Ascension, succeeds in stirring our admiration and love and the promise of our willing service. Then follows the part played by reason. Jesus Christ is not content with setting us an example, but has added definite teaching as well. The Gospel is full of divine words offered for our reflection, and in order to know them well it is necessary to understand their meaning to its very depths. Jesus Christ himself asks this of us when he says: "If you continue in my word . . . you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."[2] When souls show themselves more and more obedient to the calls of grace, they reach this third manner of prayer, which is meditation properly so called. It is higher than the two preceding kinds of prayer, in the sense that the soul is lifted more and more above corporal things. It dwells more in the domain of pure truth, that heavenly wisdom which must eventually lead it to God. In the process of this heavenly ascent, it mounted the first step by relying on the senses; it passed the second by the use made of its imagination. At this stage reason plunges it into truths which start out like luminous rays from the lips of Jesus Christ. But above these rays there is God, who dwells in light inaccessible.[3]

Should the soul now stop on its path, and reason cease its search? If the brilliancy of divine glory

[1] 1 Cor. iv 16.

[2] John viii 31, 32.

[3] 1 Tim. vi 16.

blinds the eyes of our mind, can we not shut those eyes and accept by faith the presence of the infinite Being who is overpowering us with his immensity, and thus draw near to God in the darkness in order to feel his presence more keenly, and love him more and more? But if grace does not assist us in our ascent we are powerless. Without grace we cannot have even one good thought,[1] nor pray as we should,[2] nor even pronounce the name of Jesus.[3] But since God shows himself so willing to grant us the grace of prayer, by attracting souls to him first by the senses, then by the imagination, then by the intellect, why should he not also bestow this grace upon the intelligence by blinding it with the infinite grandeur of his presence, and thus penetrating our souls with the heat of his divine love? He does do so, as the mystics testify with united voice. When a soul has persevered in the search after God by the way of meditation, and, when the power of meditating has ceased, is still drawn more and more to prayer, it will not be long before the contemplative state is attained. The soul devotes itself to loving God in the darkness of faith, and it then prays in a secret, mysterious, or mystic manner. Such is the obscure contemplation or prayer of faith, of which we have been speaking in the two preceding chapters. It can be seen from what has been already said, that the acts of the prayer of faith in no way resemble the acts of meditation or affective prayer. How can we make its nature understood, for the advantage of those souls whom God is drawing to this manner of prayer? This would be an impossible task if we believed the teaching of certain authors, for they regard contemplation as a prayer of an altogether extraordinary nature, a miraculous operation of God upon the soul, in which the creature can give no assistance whatever. It follows that it would be a foolish thing to attempt to describe the miraculous operations of God.

Thus Rodriguez, who does not admit a middle state

[1] 2 Cor. iii 5. [2] Rom. viii 26.
[3] 1 Cor. xii 3.

between ordinary meditation and miraculous contemplation, says of the latter: "It is a thing so far above the reach and conception of the human mind, that we can never comprehend or teach it. It is not, therefore, without reason that certain authors have been disapproved, who imagining that there were rules to be found by which a man might infallibly be rendered a contemplative, would take upon them to teach what no one can really apprehend, and reduce to art what is so much above both art and nature."[1] Certainly if all contemplation were of a miraculous character, the thesis set forth by Rodriguez could be defended as regards the ordinary faithful. Not so as regards priests, who should not be ignorant of any portion of sacred knowledge, whose duty it is to defend the truth against error, and who have a certain amount of responsibility even with ecstatics. But there is contemplation which has absolutely nothing miraculous about it, and we will prove this at great length in Chapters XIII, XIV, and XV.

A great many of the saints have given precise and detailed teaching on this subject. We shall give extracts from their works. None of them have pretended that it is possible to lead souls infallibly to the contemplative state. But they believe they are doing a great act of charity, by teaching souls not to offer any resistance when God is pleased to offer them the grace of contemplation. They have learned from experience that souls frequently resist the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in perfectly good faith. Souls who would be contemplatives, if they followed the impulse of grace, have gone back instead of advancing, because they were ignorant of what they should do. They are worthy of the greatest compassion, and these people have written books in order to help them. Prepared by this teaching, even if they cannot be certain of receiving the favour of contemplation, they can at least desire it, and smooth the way by removing the obstacles which prevent its reaching them; and they can also

[1] *Christian Perfection,* ch. iv: "Prayer." (English trans. Burns Oates and Washbourne.)

pray for the grace without pride, and without presumption. If all contemplation were of a miraculous nature, the saints would not have thought and spoken of it as they have done. They would have shared the opinion of Rodriguez, who said: "Not only are we unable to express what this prayer is, or to teach it to others, but even no one must seek to raise himself up to it, if God himself does not elevate him thereunto. For otherwise it would be a thought of pride and presumption, by which we should deserve to be deprived of the grace of ordinary prayer, and remain interiorly dry."[1]

Rodriguez is evidently deceived. For a great number of saints raised by the Church to her altars, and many learned men who have died in the odour of sanctity, have promulgated mystical teaching. Authors such as these are incapable of giving us bad advice, and we follow their teaching without any fear of being deceived. It is our duty even to study their works, out of respect for them and for God himself, under whose guidance they wrote their works. We can be quite sure that if these books were dangerous or merely useless, God would never have allowed them to have been written by his saints. Some of the mystics have tried to make their writings more precise in meaning by using Latin and Greek terms to express themselves more clearly. It is the recognized method in every science. But the attempt to do the same for mysticism has been ridiculed, and has never met with much success. Rodriguez makes fun of them: "After all, these mysterious analogies, these transformations of the soul, this silence of all the faculties, this annihilation, this immediate union, and all the other terms of this nature, what would they express? Can anyone comprehend anything of them? For my own part, I must frankly confess I do not. There is therefore this difference between divine science and other sciences—that in other sciences before you can learn them you must learn their terms, while in this science you can-

[1] *Christian Perfection,* ch. iv: "Prayer." (English trans. Burns Oates and Washbourne.)

not understand the terms, until you have perfectly understood and mastered the science. In others the theory precedes the practice; in this the practice goes before the theory."[1]

If Rodriguez did not understand the language of the mystics, and if other readers were equally unsuccessful, we cannot conclude that those who taught the science were at fault. There are undoubtedly in mysticism certain phenomena which can only be perfectly understood by experience; we will speak of them later on. The knowledge of these phenomena resembles in some way sense-cognition by taste, smell, etc. Although we do not know the exact flavour of a fruit until we have eaten it ourselves, yet we can know something about it by believing the description supplied by others. It is sufficient to have a correct understanding of the sense of their words. It is exactly the same in the school of mysticism. But we must here make an important observation. By refusing to mystical writers the use of technical terms in Greek and Latin, and compelling them to write in the vernacular, we have made them apply to the terms of ordinary speech a special signification, which corresponds exactly with the thought they wished to express. It is absolutely essential, in reading these works, to discover first of all the sense which they have attached to certain words.

S John of the Cross, in every one of his works, always attributes the divine union to Faith, Hope, and Charity. But he does not mean the faith which *ponders upon* every detail of the truths of revelation. He means a general obscure faith which contemplates God in himself. The meditative kind of faith is, of course, of the greatest service to the soul. At the same time, it may be an obstacle instead of an assistance to the soul seeking after union with God. S John of the Cross teaches that souls who are drawn to contemplation must even be forbidden to meditate.[2] In reading the great Spanish

[1] *Christian Perfection,* ch. iv: "Prayer." (English trans. Burns Oates and Washbourne.)

[2] See Appendix, § 6. This prohibition only applies to the time of contemplation. At other times contemplative souls meditate unceas-

mystic the same distinction must be made between Hope and Charity. Hope unites the soul with God not when it makes us hope for some particular good—a virtue, for instance—but when it makes us sigh after God with the hope of possessing him. Charity also begins to effect the divine union in us, whenever we conform to God's will by keeping his commandments. At the same time, perfect union with God needs a movement of the heart which lifts us up at once to God, in order to love him, and rest in him. In this way we find interior peace together with perfect conformity of our will with that of God.

Such is the special signification which S John of the Cross gives to the three theological virtues. If we are not mindful of this important point, we may very easily read the whole of his works without understanding a word of them. But if whenever faith is spoken of, we understand a general obscure faith which contemplates God present in our soul, and if we attach a similar general signification to the words "hope" and "charity," the saint's teaching will then be intelligible. We shall be in a position to admire and enjoy it, and even to put it into practice.

In order to avoid exposing our readers to misunderstanding, we shall endeavour to give an exact sense to the different expressions which will frequently recur in the course of this book. Take, for example, one of our propositions: "In the prayer of faith God gives nothing whatever to the intellectual and sense faculties. He offers the grace of prayer wholly to the will." It would be a very grave mistake if on seeing this proposition readers understood us to say that in contemplation the will acts without any concurrence on the part of the intelligence. It is the *inferior* faculties which give no assistance to the will. The prayer is made without any cognition taking place on the part of the senses, the imagination, or even the reason. But

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ingly on revealed truths. We can apply to them that verse of the Psalms: "Blessed is the man whose will is in the law of the Lord, on his law he shall meditate day and night" (Ps. i 2).

the exercise of the "superior intelligence" or "apex of the spirit" remains. It is there that the obscure act of faith in the presence of God is produced, as we are very careful to repeat time and again. There also terminates the experimental knowledge of the divine perfections, produced by the love with which the will is inflamed.

A comparison will explain our meaning. You are walking by night in the blackest darkness along a passage where you are absolutely forbidden to speak. Suddenly a friend silently draws near, and embracing you lovingly whispers in your ear: "It is I." Your friend's caress convinces you of the certainty of his presence, and fills your heart with affectionate love. But that is all. You cannot see him with your eyes, placed as you are in darkness. You may not engage in conversation with him, for it is forbidden you to speak. You are content with returning the embrace, and beyond that point the acts of your intelligence and will go no further. In the prayer of faith God makes his presence in the soul felt in exactly the same manner. S John of the Cross thinks that this is effected without the help of images by a contact of substances.[1] Like the friend's embrace, a similar contact gives to the mind the certainty of the divine presence, and also inflames the will with love. Our other faculties are not touched by the grace of God, but remain in darkness. And since they receive nothing they do not co-operate in the prayer. The will alone is immediately excited to pray by the force of the divine embrace.

It is an error to regard obscure contemplation as a passive state of prayer. It only becomes passive when transformed into rapture, but it remains active as long as it does not attain to a height such as this. The activity of the soul is merely changed. It is centred upon the highest point of the spirit and of the will. While this is going on, the inferior faculties of the soul are not in a state of passivity, simply because the grace of God has had no effect upon them, but they are merely given over to their natural state. If a soul

[1] *Vide supra,* Chapter IX.

has practised interior mortification, these faculties will remain calm during contemplation, which will then become very easy and delightful. But if, on the contrary, it is given to self-indulgence of every kind, the inferior faculties will then experience an agitation which will disturb the prayer of faith, and make it arid and painful, especially if it is further disturbed by the power of the Evil One.

It is no less erroneous to speak of the superior intelligence and the will being in a state of passivity. The grace of prayer is given to them in moderation, just as it is given to the inferior faculties when God prompts us to meditate. To correspond with this grace during the practice of obscure contemplation, acts of faith in the presence of God should be renewed from time to time in the highest point of the spirit, and love should be kept alive in the will by acts entirely spiritual, of which we will speak later on. There is no passivity then in any sense, but a spiritual activity so extremely simple as to bear no resemblance to the operation of the sensitive and intellectual faculties during the time of meditation and affective prayer. Often in the flow of a rapid narrative the mystics describe by one word the acts of contemplation, attributing them sometimes to the will, sometimes to the intellect. But though the mere mention of a faculty suffices them, they have always in mind a meaning which they do not put into words. The reader must remember this if he would not be misled regarding the essential points of their teaching.

We ought also to give some explanation as to the sense of the words *natural*, *common*, and *ordinary*, which are often used in speaking of the prayer of faith. In theological language *natural* is taken as the opposite of *supernatural*. It signifies everything which does not exceed the forces of nature. Acts carried out in the spirit of faith, with the assistance of grace, are, on the contrary, supernatural. Since we are called to lead a life of faith, a supernatural life, we have received for this purpose, together with sanctifying grace, the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God

also bestows actual grace for our assistance, whether it be in prayer or in the practice of virtue. But, as we pointed out in Chapter III, we receive the infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit in a tender germinal state, and they must be strengthened and developed by exercise. When a courageous soul exercises acts of infused virtue frequently, a great facility in producing them is acquired. The habit is gradually formed, and in the end they are produced without any effort, and without the need of preparing the way by reflection. Habit, they say, is a second nature. Consequently it can be said of such a soul that supernatural acts are produced naturally. There is no contradiction in speaking in this way, for the simple reason that the word *naturally* here means nothing else but *easily*.

We shall see later on, following the teaching of S John of the Cross, that when a soul has acquired the habit of obscure contemplation, it is exercised at will. At first, close attention was necessary to avoid deception regarding the nature of these interior impressions, and in order to be quite certain that they came from the Holy Spirit. Courage was also necessary to follow the attraction of an altogether new and surprising kind of grace. Gradually, as the habit formed, this reluctance and need of effort became entirely subdued to it. Since habit is a second nature, when the contemplative habit is formed, this prayer becomes in a sense natural. Once arrived at this state, a soul contemplates at will and without any effort, just as it practises in a natural way acts of humility, gentleness, or any other supernatural virtue.

We see from this the error of those who draw a distinction between acquired and infused contemplation. These two are only one contemplation which is infused on God's part, and acquired on the part of the soul, inasmuch as it corresponds obediently to the attraction of grace. In order to draw a real distinction between acquired and infused contemplation, we must consider that kind of contemplation which is miraculous in character, such as rapture and ecstasy. The prayer is then truly infused and passive, and in no sense acquired.

But if no miraculous element ever enters into the prayer of obscure contemplation, then it is always the ordinary and common kind. It is caused by the soul's own activity united with the grace of God, just like meditation and affective prayer.

We have just used the word *ordinary*. When we speak of contemplation considered in itself and in its essence, which is that of an ordinary prayer, we do so to mark the difference from miraculous states of prayer which alone are truly extraordinary. If instead of examining the nature of contemplation, we consider the people who practise it, we are forced to admit that the number of contemplatives is exceedingly small. But here again the contemplation remains ordinary and common on God's part; he grants this grace freely to all souls of good will. If, although the grace is ordinary, the fact is extraordinary, this is entirely due to the action of men, who unfortunately are so rarely found to respond to the divine call. . . . It is the same with contemplation as with the blessed Eucharist. In places where very few communicate, this is not the fault of God, who commands everyone to do so; it is the fault of Christians who neglect his invitations and disobey his orders.

One last explanation on the words *prayer* and *orison*.[1] *Prayer* is the generic word. It signifies every kind of elevation of the soul to God, whether interior or exterior, short or lengthy, private or public, etc. *Orison* is taken to express solely mental prayer of a definite length. If the prayer is very short, merely giving expression to a rapid motion of our soul towards God, it is called an ejaculation. Interior prayer is also divided into many kinds, each with a particular name. We thus have meditation, affective prayer, and contemplation. We have styled this book *The Science of Prayer* because we are setting out general rules which hold good of every kind of prayer. We beg the reader to pay

[1] *Prière, oraison.* In this work *prayer* has been used indifferently as a translation of both, there being no good word in English to explain the distinction. *Orison* is somewhat archaic and unusual.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

great attention to all that has been said in this chapter. If only the precise sense attached to certain terms used in this book is remembered, it will not be difficult to understand the teaching of the saints on prayer. We will now continue our exposition of it, and endeavour to make it as clear as possible.

CHAPTER XII

PRAYER OF FAITH AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

THE Greek word *theology* means "the science about God." Our reason knows God by means of the light proper to it, and by contemplating the wonderful works of creation. This is natural theology or natural science about God. We have a closer knowledge of him by studying all the truths which have been revealed, and this is theology properly so called, embracing an exposition of Catholic dogma. It is possible for these two kinds of theology to enlighten the mind without producing in us any love of God. The wicked angels enjoy both kinds of knowledge, yet these wretched beings are powerless to love. Many sinners also have acquired them without ever arriving at the love of God.

But it is not the same with the intimate knowledge of God, which is called mystical theology. This reaches the mind through the channel of the heart, and it is the fruit of that love of God practised during contemplation. Unlike the first two kinds of theology, which enrich the mind with distinct kinds of knowledge, mystical theology enlightens it in an altogether secret and mysterious manner; this is the sense of the word *mystical*. We learn to know God, not by the help of reason, but in an experimental manner, by a lively appreciation of his goodness, power, and infinite perfections. If, then, we are speaking of revealed truths apprehended clearly and precisely, the author quoted at the end of Chapter X was right in every respect. We do not advise professors of theology to prepare their lectures by making the prayer of faith. May they do this preparation during meditation? To make use of this pious exercise in order to probe religious truths to their depth and understand them better, would be to lose sight of its object and make it a study. Medita-

tion, like the prayer of faith, should lead us to love. We may undoubtedly make use of it as a preparation for teaching theology, and preaching, provided it is done not under the form of study but as a prayer. It is then a most salutary practice, for we then approach God in order to enrich our hearts with holy sentiments, in order to write about them as S Bonaventure did, and preach them like the saints of God.

This much granted, we must now show how this prayer does really enlighten the mind with knowledge. It is the most valuable knowledge of all, for it assists the soul in making progress in virtue. One cannot say the same for the distinct cognitions acquired by natural and revealed theology. Unfortunately they are frequently an aid to self-love. What we are affirming is the teaching of the whole tradition of the Catholic Church, and we will prove our words by the witness of the saints. For a long time the very word "theology" was used to express only that knowledge of God obtained during prayer. Compared with this, other knowledge was not valued very highly, and was even scorned. There were many revealed truths which were not taught to the faithful until after baptism; they were concealed from the catechumens. This was the *discipline of the secret*, a law which was in force even among the philosophers. But a man did not become a theologian on the day when he learned these truths which had been concealed from the crowd, but only when he came to know God in an intimate and secret manner, by means of the practice of contemplation. This fact is certain from the affirmation of two saints in so many words. The first, S Diadochus, a sixth-century writer, defines a theologian as follows: "*Theologus, id est rerum divinarum contemplator:* A theologian is one who contemplates things divine." S John Climachus says: "Those are worthy to be called theologians, who in their prayer are penetrated and inflamed with a fire which is wholly sacred and divine."

How is the intelligence enlightened during the prayer of faith? Various saints have desired to teach us, and first of all the illustrious Albertus Magnus. "The

science," he says, "which proceeds from the data of reason, places the truths which it produces in the light of day. But this science (mysticism) does not proceed from the data of reason, but from a certain divine light which is not the affirmation (clear and precise) of any one truth. The object seized by the soul (*i.e.*, God himself) acts so forcibly upon the intelligence, that the soul desires to be united to him at whatever cost. This object being so far beyond the reach of the intelligence is not made clearly known, and the intellect itself relies upon a kind of knowledge which is not determined in any way.[1]

Listen now to S John of the Cross and the wonderful precision of his teaching. In *The Spiritual Canticle*, stanza xxvii, at the verse, "There he taught me the science full of sweetness," he writes: "This science is mystical theology, which is the secret science of God, and which spiritual men call contemplation. It is most full of sweetness because it is knowledge by love; love is the master of it, and it is love which renders it so sweet. Inasmuch as this science and knowledge are communicated to the soul in that love with which God communicates himself, it is therefore sweet to the intellect, because the object of intellect is science, and sweet to the will because it arises from love which is the object of the will."[2] Later on in the same canticle the saint returns to this point: "It is called night, because contemplation is obscure; and that is the reason why it is also called mystical theology—that is, the secret or hidden wisdom of God, wherein God, without the sound of words, or the intervention of any bodily or spiritual sense, as it were in silence and repose, in the darkness of sense and nature, teaches the soul—and the soul knows not how—in a most secret and hidden way. Some spiritual writers call this "understanding without understanding" because it does not take place in what philosophers call the *active* intellect, which is conversant with the forms, fancies, and apprehensions of the physical faculties, but in the *passive* intellect, which, without receiving such forms, receives passively only

[1] *De Myst. Theol.* [2] Works, ii, p. 48.

the substantial understanding of them free from all imagery."[1]

Now examine the teaching of S Teresa: "In this prayer we understand without understanding, and see without seeing. When the prayer is finished we are in the same condition as if we had seen and had received new knowledge. Why is this? It is because the effects of God's word have enveloped us. He has infused into our soul all the illumination and all the sentiments he desired, just as a whole sheet of paper is covered with print at one stroke. . . . In the obscurity and profound silence of this heavenly teaching, more is learnt in the space of a *Credo* than would be acquired in ten years at the feet of learned men."[2]

Although the words of the saint are primarily applied to a state of quiet which is supernatural and miraculous, they are true also, in the proper proportion, for the ordinary state. For these two mystic prayers are of the same nature. They differ only in the degree of divine union attained, it being incomparably greater in the extraordinary prayer of quiet.

In our *Elucidation* there are other quotations from S John of the Cross and S Teresa affirming that obscure contemplation does enlighten the soul, and enrich it with real knowledge. We have added weight to their authority by quoting many saints who have written on mystical theology, and taught the same doctrine, but space will not permit us to reproduce all these texts here.[3] The last quotation is taken from S Bonaventure. He writes in the *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum:* "To understand thoroughly the interior things of spirituality, or mystic science, we must have recourse to desire, not to understanding; to aspiration, not to books; to God, not man; to Jesus our Spouse, not learned men; to mystical darkness, not the glare of light; to burning fire, not brilliant illumination." Gerson gave a summary of this doctrine when he said:

[1] Works, ii, p. 208. Stanza xxxix: "In a serene night."
[2] Quoted by Père de Caussade, *Instructions familières,* Part I, Dialogue 8.
[3] *Les éclaircissements,* pp. 41-53. English: Lig[illegible]

"The object of mystical theology is experimental knowledge of God produced in the unifying embrace of love."[1] All the mystics have recognized that the prayer of faith enriches the soul with real knowledge of God. They have even deduced an axiom: "God is known far better by a negative than a positive way." We seek to know God by the way of affirmation when we state some clear precise truth about him, either as regards his perfections or his works. We enter on the negative way when we pass over these particular truths and cry out: "God is infinitely above all that I have just seen"; and we then abandon ourselves to the darkness of a general faith, in order to arrive at a better knowledge of him.

S John of the Cross has given us a beautiful commentary on this axiom of mystical theology at the beginning of *The Spiritual Canticle* in explaining the verse, "Where hast thou hidden thyself?"—"Thou greatly magnifiest God, and drawest near unto him, esteeming him as far beyond all thou canst reach. Rest not, therefore, neither wholly nor in part, on what thy faculties can produce; never seek to satisfy thyself with what thou comprehendest in God, but rather with what thou comprehendest not; and do not rest on the love of that which thou canst understand and feel, but rather on that which is beyond thy understanding and feeling: *this is to seek him by faith.* God is inaccessible and hidden, and though it may seem that thou hast found him, felt him, and comprehended him, yet thou must ever regard him as hidden, and serve him as hidden in secret. Be not thou like the unwise, who, with low views of God, think that when they cannot comprehend him, or be conscious of his presence, he is then farther away and more hidden—when the contrary is true, namely, that he is nearer to them when they are least aware of it; as it is written: 'He made darkness his covert.'[2] Thus, when thou art near unto him, the very infirmity of thy vision makes the obscurity palpable."[3]

Because the knowledge thus acquired is obscure, and

[1] *Considérations,* 28. [2] Ps. xvii 12. [3] Works, ii, p. 19.

is not expressed in brilliant efforts of reason, some readers will be tempted to smile and treat it as purely imaginery. But the wanderings of imagination disappear, and we cannot treat these ideas as mere dreams, which, when they pass into practical life, find expression in acts of virtue. This is the case with true mystics. The prayer purifies their judgement, and procures for them a wisdom wholly divine, which is manifested in their conduct at every step. It may be said that they possess an instructive knowledge of what is pleasing and displeasing to God. Is there better proof of their progress in knowledge, a progress which is due to contemplative prayer? M. l'Abbé Saudreau has rightly remarked this fact. He bears witness to the teaching of the saints. Speaking of souls who by means of the prayer of faith have attained to divine union and a state of perfection, he says: "Are there not, among these souls, many who are the least instructed in human science, yet wonderfully enlightened in spiritual matters? Who realize better than they the heinousness of sin, which they hold in such great abhorrence, the beauty of virtue, the glory of purity, the necessity of devotion, and the value of a human soul? Who realize better than they the nothingness of all created things? They are so convinced of their own misery that humility appears to them the most natural thing in the world. None say with more sincerity: We are unprofitable servants. They clearly possess the most elevated notions of God, and much more than ordinary light on the important points of religion. And how have they acquired these lights? Not by study; for many who have studied more deeply and received better instruction, are very far from being convinced of the lovableness and ineffable majesty of God. Nor is it by their own reflections, for many who have given more time to reflection, and possess greater powers of penetration, have not by any means the same degree of enlightenment. Moreover, those ideas which we acquire by reasoning and study may always be expressed in human language. Now when a perfect soul perceives the force of some great truth, no words

can be found to express faithfully the thought which fills the mind. The light it possesses, of a much higher nature than that enjoyed by ordinary men, comes directly from God himself, and is the fruit born by the gifts of the Holy Spirit."[1] The things of the physical world avoid the grasp of pure reason which has knowledge of them through sense experience. Sight reveals colour to us; hearing sound; taste sweetness, etc. Well, God has desired to become the object of our spiritual sense, as it is written: "*Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus:* Taste and see that the Lord is sweet."[2] He has given himself in the blessed Eucharist to be our food, to be eaten by us. We must have this experience if we would know him perfectly. Now this experience is gained during prayer, and above all in contemplative prayer. It refines the spiritual taste without which we cannot know the sweetness of the eucharistic bread. The more this supernatural taste is developed, the more is the experimental knowledge of God increased in the soul.

[1] *La vie d'union*, p. 15. [2] Ps. xxxiii 9.

CHAPTER XIII

PRAYER OF FAITH A COMMON GRACE

We are now dealing with the prayer of faith as an act, not as a habit. All prayer is an effect of our correspondence with grace. This grace is an actual grace and passes quickly away. God, of course, holds it always at our disposal, and if we corresponded with it unceasingly we would be in a continual state of prayer. But as a matter of fact, correspondence such as this is very rarely to be found. People who are drawn to prayer by the way of meditation do not meditate day and night, and the same applies to those who practise affective prayer. Why, then, should it be otherwise for the prayer of faith? Undoubtedly it is easier in this case to attain to an uninterrupted state of prayer than in meditation or affective prayer. These need an application of the mind and the senses which is absolutely impossible in this present life, where a thousand cares divert our attention to other things and exhaust our strength. But anyone who practises the prayer of faith, which employs the will alone, leaving the other faculties untouched, may keep the will inflamed with the love of God in the midst of occupations and distractions of every kind.

Cassian and Clement of Alexandria frequently speak of this continuous state which the habitual prayer of faith produces. Bossuet explains the sense of their words. The continuity meant is moral, not rigorous and metaphysical. It consists in the *intention* which is always present: "It is a profound application of the will fixed upon God alone by the habit of holy love. Now by the firmness of this habit we tend to a continuous state of prayer, because nothing which is necessary for attaining it is ever forgotten. This habit produces a succession of good actions, so immediate and

uniform, that we see their dependence on one interior principle as their source—that is to say, on a habit of holy love, which in this life is called contemplation or continual prayer."[1] For this, a courageous mortification is necessary in order to detach the will completely from the love of creatures, and fix it entirely on God. The soul has then reached a state of divine union, and its prayer never comes to an end. How difficult to acquire is perfection such as this! It needs the habitual state of every virtue. Extremely rare indeed is the state of continual prayer. For this reason, we are speaking of the prayer made from time to time, sometimes with very long intervals. Some very imperfect souls, who fall easily into sin, and even into mortal sin, from which they quickly rise, have happily formed the habit of devoting some hours daily to prayer—for example, by hearing daily Mass. Is the prayer of faith possible for them? Are they worthy of it? Or is not meditation and affective prayer sufficient for them? If sanctity consisted in obscure contemplation practised from time to time, the answer would not be doubtful. Since we are dealing with persons who are not saints, but who are in fact very imperfect, we should say without hesitation: They are deceived; their prayer is not and never can be a contemplative state. But the prayer of faith, when it is not habitual, can never be a result or indication of a perfect life. Like the two preceding prayers, it is a means of raising the soul to sanctity. It is certainly a most efficacious means, but, after all, it is nothing more than a means, and we must look closely at the manner in which it is used. If used more or less frequently, and with more or less perfection, the results will be in proportion to the trouble taken. This is true of every kind of prayer, including contemplation.

This being so, the question is considerably simplified. Our business is to know the laws in accordance with which the Holy Spirit acts, when offering to souls a special way of praying. The grace of prayer is not in itself a reward; otherwise sinners and those who are

[1] *Instruct. sur l'oraison mentale,* Bk. V, § 43. Quoted by Père de Caussade, *Instruct. Spirituelle,* Part I, Dialogue 6.

unfaithful would often be deprived of it. S Alphonsus Liguori has demonstrated this fact, that God in his infinite mercy has placed this grace at the disposal of all men. Is this not true of all kinds of prayer? May not God show himself equally generous on this point, regarding more our needs and capabilities than our merits? We have Mary Magdalen as an example, who was taken from the midst of sin and raised at once to a state of perfect prayer. The Ven. Père Libermann has assured us that many souls are drawn from the beginning to affective prayer without ever having been able to meditate. Why should not some souls arrive also at the prayer of faith, without ever having passed through the transitory stages?

Let it be well understood, as we said at the beginning of the chapter, that we are speaking of the act of contemplation, not the habit. Although this act is a gift of God, it is not an extraordinary act placed entirely beyond our reach. The grace of contemplation is granted with truly divine generosity to souls who devote themselves generously to prayer. We have already called attention in Chapter V to a remark of Père Joseph du Tremblay that it is possible for souls, at the very beginning of the spiritual life, to be raised at times to a state of divine union during the exercise of meditation. It is quite different with the *habit* of contemplation, which needs a long and faithful correspondence with grace, and courageous persevering labour to remove the obstacles which stand in the way. We will speak of it more fully later on when dealing with progress in the prayer of faith. For that matter, this condition is indispensable for the formation of every habit. A habit is acquired not by one passing act, but by a succession of acts which accustom the faculties to act in a particular way, and end by making that way quite natural. Then the effort required at the beginning disappears. The act is performed by habit, without weariness, often even with pleasure.

The saints earnestly exhort us to desire contemplation, to ask God for it, and prepare the soul to receive it. In order that the habit may quickly take root, they

even counsel us to try this manner of prayer every time that occasion offers. Thus, when during meditation some feeling of love for God touches our heart, they tell us to stop and pause for a short time in order to devote ourselves to loving without reflection. If contemplation were an unusual miraculous kind of thing, the saints would never have given us advice of this kind. They would have warned us against it, just as they warn us from desiring revelations and ecstasy. We act in the same way in the natural order. Thus, no one in his senses would advise us to walk upon the water, jump from a sixth-floor window in order to learn how to fly, or lie down in a burning furnace in order to have a warm night's rest. But we *are* invited to ride on horseback, cycle, and climb high mountains. Advice in taking any line of action always supposes that it is possible, and within the range of ordinary mortals.

The experience of souls given to prayer is a further support of our thesis. If the grace of contemplation were a supernatural and unusual gift, reserved for privileged souls, most of the attempts at making this prayer would end in humiliating rebuffs, or deplorable illusions. Now this is by no means the case. People who have followed in this way the teaching of the saints, have met with perfect success, as we will shortly prove. We live in a world of facts, and facts are certain when they rest on the testimony of numberless witnesses of quite exceptional reliability. During the lifetime of S Teresa the Carmelites were usually fervent religious, but they were not all saints fit for canonization. In the *Foundations*, ch. v, S Teresa speaks in the following terms: "She scarcely found in any house a religious whom their divine Master led by the way of meditation. All the others were raised to perfect contemplation. Some were even favoured with rapture."[1]

[1] Some writers, wishing at any cost to make contemplation an extraordinary and miraculous prayer, in order to draw souls away from it, and enslave them to the way of meditation, have falsified these words of S Teresa. They have dared, observes Père Bouix,

Time and again I have had to restore peace to Carmelites who have been disturbed by the words of certain preachers and confessors! They spare no effort in drawing them away from the teaching on prayer left to them by S Teresa and S John of the Cross. It is not surprising that souls are not raised to perfect contemplation if they are submitted to similar influences.[1] Observe also that in placing perfect contemplation midway between meditation and rapture, the saint clearly shows that she is speaking of contemplation which has no miraculous element about it—*i.e.*, ordinary contemplation. It will be more or less perfect according to the degree of fervour in those who practise it. But up to the moment when it becomes a miraculous state, it remains ordinary contemplation.

S Jane Frances de Chantal affirms the same fact about all the nuns of the Visitation, and we have quoted her words in our *Elucidation of the Works of S John of the Cross*. She is just as explicit in speaking of souls who devote themselves to prayer, whether in the cloister or in the world. They nearly all, according to her, arrive at contemplation when they are well instructed, and practise this pious exercise fervently and perseveringly. They attain to it more quickly in the religious life. But in the world also, a soul given to prayer may easily arrive at the contemplative state.

In this matter S John of the Cross is only repeating the words of S Gregory the Great. He says: "The

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to place the following foolish observation on the lips of the most spiritual of all the saints: "The graces bestowed by our Lord on these converts are so great, that God leads all the religious by the way of meditation, and some among them are even raised to perfect contemplation." This falsehood was repeated in all the Spanish editions of the saint's works and in translations of them. It has been discovered in these days by Père Marcel Bouix, S.J., who has at last put an end to the deception.

[1] The influences of which we speak extend back for some time in the history of the Carmelites. They began in the lifetime of S Teresa. The saint perceived the danger a short time before her death, and wished to preserve her daughters from it. An account of this incident may be read in M. Joly, *Vie de S Térèse*, ch. x, pp. 228, 229.

grace of contemplation is not bestowed on the great and refused to the humble. It is frequently given both to one and the other. Those who have withdrawn from the world are more often its favoured recipients, yet sometimes married people receive it. There is no occupation for souls which is incompatible with the grace of contemplation. Every truly interior soul may be the grateful recipient of its light, nor should such a one glorify himself *as if it were an extraordinary privilege*. For the most part, those to whom this gift is given are men who are undoubtedly raised very high by the generosity of their desires, but whose business keeps them in a very inferior station."[1]

When God gives this grace he never draws back, for as S Paul says, his gifts are without repentance.[2] He gives it to us in his mercy, just as at other times he gives the grace of meditation and affective prayer, whether we correspond faithfully or not. It is the same with this gift as with sanctifying grace, and the merit acquired by the practice of virtue. Both grace and merit are lost by mortal sin, but they may be recovered again by absolution or perfect contrition. In restoring sanctifying grace to our soul, God in his generosity returns all the merit acquired before the sin was forgiven. He acts in the same way with regard to contemplation. I have had charge of the direction of souls now for more than forty-five years, and more than once I have established this fact. Souls who have been raised to this kind of prayer and have given way to infidelities more or less frequently, when they return again to God, recover the power of praying as they had done previously. I speak of the act of contemplation, not the habit, which cannot be recovered with such facility. A comparison will make my meaning more clear. A skilled horseman gives up riding, say, for several years. When he begins again, it will cost him a good deal of effort to recover his former style. But it will not be necessary for him to go through a course of lessons as when he first learned to ride. In the

[1] Quoted by Saudreau, *La vie d'union*, pp. 151, 152.
[2] Rom. xi 29.

same way a contemplative who has relapsed and fallen into sin will have to do penance and practise mortification and self-denial, but it will not be necessary in prayer to begin again with meditation and affective prayer. I have never met with an instance in which this was necessary. Whenever the prayer of faith has been practised again after an interval of relapse, the soul has been successful in raising herself up, and entering once more on the path of perfection.

One more example in conclusion, the authenticity of which is guaranteed. A novice who had analysed Rodriguez' *Christian Perfection* and Saint-Jure's *Religious Man* was one day forcing himself to pray in the ordinary method. Suddenly he heard distinctly these interior words: "Quiet thyself." They produced an immediate effect. A sudden calm possessed the soul of this novice, and at once he understood the possibility of adoring and loving God, by gazing upon him in silence. He remained in this state for many years, and when he became a professed religious still retained the grace of contemplation. He led a most vigorous and active life, but on leaving, for instance, the busiest of public meetings, if he desired to pray, he found it absolutely impossible to meditate; nor was he any more successful in endeavouring to stir up in his heart the emotions of sense devotion. It was sufficient for him to close his eyes in order to come at once into the presence of the Blessed Trinity, and he felt the need of adoring God, and loving him in the obscurity of faith by abandoning himself to the divine guidance with childlike love. We are certain that every contemplative, if questioned, would give the same account. It would then be seen that we have every right to affirm that the grace of contemplation is nothing extraordinary. God easily grants it, and it is not a difficult thing to retain.

CHAPTER XIV

IGNORANCE OF THE TRUTH CONTAINED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER IS VERY HARMFUL TO SOULS: DENIAL OF IT IS FATAL

The majority of spiritual writers say absolutely nothing at all about obscure contemplation, or the prayer of faith; they leave souls in fatal ignorance. The evil is still greater when they only mention this prayer in order to give erroneous teaching on the subject. The silence of some and the errors of others are the result of a widespread prejudice against mysticism, which has even penetrated into the ranks of the clergy. Not only are many priests ignorant of this science, but they make it a boast that they have never read the works of one mystical author, and often they forbid the faithful to read them as they would forbid evil literature. How has such a state of mind been produced? The passages from Rodriguez quoted in Chapter XI are sufficient to explain the origin of it. Rodriguez is a classic, read over and over again especially in the ecclesiastical seminaries. Who would be so rash as to wish to study the science of mysticism, after reading his criticism levelled against it in the treatise on Prayer? His ridicule of Tauler goes further, since it may easily be applied even to canonized saints. Aspirants to the priesthood, who imbibe this criticism and ridicule without any corrective, naturally come to receive it as Gospel truth. Most of them firmly resolve never to read one single work on mysticism, even if its author were raised to the altars of the Church, and as this resolution favours laziness, it is fairly certain that it will be kept most rigorously.

Anyone wishing to know this subject in detail should read M. l'Abbé Saudreau's *La vie d'union*. Several very interesting revelations are contained in § iv of chap. viii: "Deviation from the Traditional Doctrine."

The deviation came about during the sixteenth century. It may be seen there how the clergy have been condemned to ignorance of mysticism, and even imbued with serious errors on this subject. A wise man will not attempt to teach a matter of which he is ignorant. This is the reason why numerous spiritual writers, having no notion whatever of mysticism, have prudently kept silence on the subject. Those who have been bold enough to speak about it, in spite of their ignorance, have done so badly with fatal results. It would be difficult to estimate the harm which has resulted to souls, owing to the ignorance of the one class of spiritual writer, and the erroneous teaching of the other. This prayer is, in fact, a much more common grace than we suppose. If every soul to whom it was offered corresponded faithfully, contemplatives would be innumerable both in convents and even in the world. Unfortunately the Holy Ghost bestows it on many souls with utter futility. They resist it and draw back instead of making progress. It is rarely bad will on their part; more often it is the result of ignorance or prejudice.

We said in Chapter VIII that the transition from meditation to affective prayer took place quite naturally. When a subject has been meditated upon for the hundredth time, mental curiosity instinctively turns away from it in order to seek something new elsewhere. Then, if the heart has much confidence in God, it is filled with love and affection. The soul rules the agitations of the mind. It devotes itself to love instead of thought. It is the time of affective prayer. But the feelings grow blunt in their turn, and the once vivid emotions become wearying. All their strength is exhausted and the soul ends by finding itself deprived of the help both of mind and heart. The good will to pray is alone left to it. God does not abandon the soul at this critical moment, and far from doing violence to our nature, he stands near at hand to help us in our need. He then offers to the soul the grace of prayer, communicating it directly to the will. He makes his presence felt in the obscurity of faith and invites us to a love entirely spiritual, calm, and silent.

The novelty of this interior state alarms us, and if we have never been instructed on the subject, we understand absolutely nothing about it. The attraction of grace making itself felt in a sweet delightful way often passes unperceived. If we agitate ourselves by seeking after good thoughts and sense emotions of the love of God, we make it wellnigh impossible to recognize this new embrace of the Holy Spirit. When in the midst of interior silence we recollect for one moment, the fear seizes us that we are doing nothing and wasting time. We find it absolutely impossible to recognize prayer in a simple gaze upon God, which finds no expression in any set phrase or any emotion of the heart.

The manner in which the transition from affective prayer to contemplation is effected also baffles the soul. For God does not act upon us violently. He does not roughly and forcibly conduct us from one state to another. He varies the action of his grace, which is exercised in turn upon the mind, heart, and will. He thus gradually allures us to discard our old mode of prayer in order to take up an entirely new one. These variations last until the habit of contemplation is reached. S John of the Cross gives the following teaching on this point: "At the beginning," he says, "the habitual state of simple loving knowledge is not formed sufficiently to allow souls to produce a contemplative act *whenever they will.*" These words *whenever they will* are remarkable. If souls do not possess this power at the beginning, they will have it later on, when they have formed the habit of recognizing immediately that loving realization of God's presence, which invites them to contemplation. This prayer then has nothing miraculous or extraordinary about it. Later on S John of the Cross says of these beginners: "They are not so absolutely powerless to make a meditation, that their mind cannot sometimes discover in it some new food for reflection."

How essential it is for these souls to understand clearly how the Holy Spirit acts, in order that they may not resist him when he does so. If they are not en-

lightened they will experience only continual sorrow, trouble, and discouragement, and if their state continues any length of time, life for them will be one long martyrdom. This is not merely the lot of uneducated persons. On the contrary, simple folk more often pass easily through this experience unassisted. The most unfortunate souls and those most to be pitied are well-instructed people, who have imbibed all sorts of erroneous teaching on this point from badly chosen sources. Priests and theologians are not always free from causing torture of this kind. I remember meeting a very learned scholar and well-known author who was in this very state. He came to me and said: "Father, you have made my life worth living once more. My inability to meditate had deeply discouraged me, and I was at a loss to know how to pray. But I see it clearly now and I feel that prayer has become easy to me." An immediate transformation took place in his soul. I have seen him since. He has once more found a taste for prayer, and at times devotes several hours in succession to this holy exercise without any weariness.

It requires an unusual degree of courage to persevere in the will to pray, when God has inflicted dullness of mind and dryness of heart upon the soul, in order to draw it to contemplation; his action is not understood, nor his guidance followed. A weak will quickly gives way under the weight of this cross. When it has repeatedly tried to meditate and to produce affectionate sentiments without any success but only excessive weariness, the soul ends by becoming profoundly discouraged, and eventually gives up the practice of prayer. If such a one is living a community life and has to devote a certain time to this exercise, he does so with a weariness which cannot be shaken off. He is convinced that further effort is useless, and either passes the allotted time in imaginary dreaming, or else falls asleep. That is what souls come to who have failed to discern the action of grace and follow it obediently. What is to be done to restore in these souls the taste for prayer? And for those who have still persevered

in the will to pray, how put an end to their sufferings and procure interior peace for their souls?

Their ignorance must first be dispelled by teaching them the true doctrine of contemplation. It is possible to pray to God in silence; we may adore and love him by merely fixing our gaze upon him. It is an excellent kind of prayer, and also quite ordinary and common, to which we may devote our attention without pride, presumption, or danger. They must be told these things gently and kindly, and their souls gradually drawn along just as an infant is taken by the hand to teach it how to walk. If they persevere until they are delivered from their doubts and fears, they will not be long in acquiring the habit of contemplation. Then their own experience will reassure them, and they will clearly understand and joyfully put into practice the doctrine of the saints. I have spent my life in consoling poor souls and delivering them from their sorrows by proceeding in this way. If priests could only understand the gravity of this question, how eager they would be to study the science of prayer in the school of saintly mysticism! But the word "mysticism" immediately brings into their mind the idea of rapture and ecstasy. Will they ever meet in the course of their lives even one ecstatic? Even so, would such souls ever be in need of direction? The Holy Spirit, who communicates himself to their souls, will be an all-sufficient director for them.[1] Why waste time in studying a science which will never be of any practical use? That is, if prayer can be called a science at all! One can understand the value of asceticism in order to teach the practice of virtue, but what is the use of mysticism? These are the notions which many priests have, and which only serve to deepen the prejudice we have just spoken of.

They remain then in absolute ignorance of all the teachings of the saints on prayer. When they come across souls who are overwhelmed with interior difficulties, they have no word of advice to offer through

[1] This is a great mistake. Ecstatics have just as much need of a director as other souls who are striving after perfection.

being ignorant of the right method of direction. Sometimes they shamefully mislead these souls, load them with reproaches, and compel them to labour in forcing the meditation which has become impossible for them. The more compassionate priests exhort them to be patient, and try to console them without knowing how to shed any light upon their souls, which would put an end to their troubles and their perplexity. The most dangerous advisers are those whose minds are filled with false notions about the nature of contemplation. When they communicate these ideas to others, instead of leading them to prayer, they draw them away from it for ever, and fasten them down to the slavery of interior struggle.

Here is an example of the pernicious errors which some authors have spread abroad on this subject. One of them in a recent work which lovingly dwells on the states of mystic prayer begins in this way: "The different degrees of prayer must be divided into two great classes: *ordinary* prayer and that which is called *mystic* or *extraordinary*." The prayer of faith, which is the mystic prayer *par excellence*, a prayer which is shared in common by so many Christians, is placed in the category of *extraordinary* prayer. Is not this the surest means of estranging souls from that kind of prayer to which the Holy Spirit is drawing them in such numbers? Père Louis Lallemant calls attention to this fact: "Nowadays," he says, "if anyone aspires to a degree of prayer which is a little above the common, he is flatly told that these are extraordinary gifts of God, which he grants only to a few favoured ones, and that we must neither desire nor pray for them. Thus the door which leads to these gifts is for ever closed. It is a great abuse."[1] It is true that the author of this division of prayer into two categories counsels us to desire these extraordinary favours, even ecstasy, provided they are not manifested in public. But no one is persuaded by this advice. Souls with a grain of humility always fear anything extraordinary,

[1] *Doctrine Spir. Princ.*, VII, ch. i.

and if all mystic prayer is of this sort they would not hear it mentioned at any cost.

But this is not all. The author continues to say: "They are called *mystic*, because they are states or supernatural acts which God does not generally leave at man's disposal. They are of such a nature that even if we wished to produce them we would not succeed in so doing even in a feeble manner or for one instant." We have seen a little earlier in this chapter that, when the habit of ordinary contemplation is acquired, it can be used at will. S John of the Cross affirms this as a general fact applying to everyone. It is always at our disposal, which is the exact opposite of what the author just quoted has said. Which of the two is right? If when we wish to practise a mystic prayer, we are unable to do so even in a feeble manner or for one instant, this would be because God alone is the sole efficient cause. It is of a miraculous nature like the ecstatic state, in which the soul is reduced to passivity, and must be content with merely consenting to the divine operation without any personal action of its own. The result of teaching such as this is to deepen the prejudice which warns everyone away from the study of mysticism.

We admit the fact that ecstatics are rare without the slightest hesitation, and agree that the kind of knowledge which is necessary for their direction is of very little practical utility for the majority. Serious people who are even more careful of their time than of their money, prefer not to spend it on study of this kind. Consequently they remain ignorant of the doctrine of the saints on prayer, and have not sufficient knowledge to instruct souls who are called to ordinary contemplation. When these people read an erroneous definition like the preceding one they act in one of two ways. Either they act with presumption, and imagining that they are being called to this miraculous state, prepare their souls for it after the manner of Quietists, with the firm resolution to do nothing whatever themselves but leave everything to God. Or else they are humble, and through fear of being placed in an extraordinary state

of prayer, force themselves to resist the action of the Holy Spirit, and return at whatever cost to meditation. Happily this author is deceived in the view he holds. No theologian with the least experience of obscure contemplation would accept his definition. Those who have no experience will accept it without doubt, and possibly admire it, but what is their judgement worth? When blind men attempt to speak about colours, they propound the strangest propositions, which other blind men do not regard as in any way peculiar. They may be told that scarlet is like the sharp notes of a clarion, and are delighted with the description. But when men with good sight, who see things as they really are, hear these singular statements, they cannot resist a smile.

We have said that in contemplation we taste and touch God, and acquire an *experimental* knowledge of him. Nothing can supply the place of experience in knowledge of this kind. S John of the Cross says as much in *The Spiritual Canticle:* "This is clear only to those who have had experience of it. But the experienced soul, comprehending that there is something further of which it is profoundly conscious, calls it 'I know not what.' As that cannot be understood, so neither can it be described, though it be felt, as I have said."[1]

These words should make those writers reflect who, without having any practical experience of contemplation, feel it their duty to speak about mysticism. Out of respect for the affirmation of this great saint, they should repeat word for word the teaching of the mystics. By allowing themselves to make personal observations, they run the risk of deceiving others as well. We will return for a moment to this author's definition and see how self-contradictory he is. He writes, a few pages later: "The sense of a word is fixed by usage." Now, from time immemorial, custom has always called that prayer *mystical* in which the soul communes with God secretly and mysteriously in the darkness of faith. This prayer may at times be miracu-

[1] Works, ii, p. 44.

lous, as, for instance, "ecstasy," but the miraculous is in no sense a part of its essence. For the most part contemplatives receive merely ordinary grace, and practise the prayer of faith just as others do meditation. By making the miraculous belong to the essence of mystical prayer, he departs from the rules of a good definition, which should apply to the whole object defined, and that object alone.

There are, in fact, miraculous states of prayer which contain no mystical element at all. When Bernadette, praying before the Grotto of Lourdes, suddenly saw an apparition of the Blessed Virgin, where was the mysticism of her prayer? She was in the full light of day, and could relate to others all that she had seen and heard. But in ordinary contemplation, on the contrary, which has absolutely nothing of the miraculous about it, secret experiences are received which it is impossible to put into words. They are expressed in acts of virtue. I have devoted a whole chapter to the proof of it.[1] If we followed this author's definition, the prayer of Bernadette at Lourdes would be a mystic state, and ordinary contemplation would not. This would be as good as saying that there is no such thing as ordinary contemplation, and that, outside of extraordinary miraculous states of prayer, we must confine ourselves to meditation or at most to affective prayer. Now such a doctrine is false and dangerous. It brings misery to a multitude of poor souls, and prevents them from attaining sanctity.

[1] I will add a short quotation from S Bernard: "The Word, the Spouse, in penetrating the inmost depths of my soul, never made his presence known by extraordinary means, either of voice or form. I only felt his touch by the movement of my heart, and showed how efficacious was his presence by amending the vices of my life" (*On the Canticle of Canticles*).

CHAPTER XV

AN OBJECTION ANSWERED

The facts and arguments contained in the preceding chapters will not convince everyone. Some will be certain to object: "As a matter of fact, contemplatives are very rare. How, then, can the prayer of faith be an ordinary grace offered without distinction to every soul of good will? Clearly it is an exceptional favour, reserved for the chosen few." We willingly admit that there are very few contemplatives, but this can be explained on many grounds. I have already indicated some and will proceed to give others. It would, however, be wrong to place among these reasons the supposed will of God, making contemplation the privilege of a few, and resembling in some way the gift of miracles. We may admit, without detriment to God's infinite goodness, that he bestows the gift of miracles and other graces *gratis datae* according to his good pleasure. These graces are for the good of others, not for the advantage of those who receive them. They are even a source of danger to the recipient, and for this reason should be feared rather than desired, as we said at the beginning of Chapter III.

Obscure contemplation, on the contrary, is extremely beneficial for the work of our sanctification. We will establish this at some length. The exercise of it is perfectly safe and without the slightest element of danger. Moreover, since God desires our sanctification more than any other thing, why should this grace be withheld from those souls of good will who ardently long for it, and prepare themselves becomingly for its reception? The fewness of contemplative souls is sufficiently explained by the perverse will of men. Consequently, it would be wrong to attribute "partiality" to God in this matter, refusing nothing to a small number of

privileged souls, and loth to bestow these graces on the rest. When we judge God in this way we are guilty of a dangerous sophism which may easily lead us into serious error. We may conclude the possibility of a fact from its existence—"*ab actu ad posse valet consecutio.*" But it is never allowable to conclude the impossibility of a fact from its non-existence. A few examples will prove this statement.

The Scriptures speak of the fewness of the elect. Impressed by this fact, some have drawn the following conclusion: "God, then, does not positively wish to save all men; therefore, Jesus Christ did not shed his blood for the redemption of all sinners." These are two horrible forms of heresy. The Ten Commandments bind everyone without exception. Everyone, therefore, is bound by the first, which tells us to love God with our whole heart. How do we keep this commandment? Numbers of men never give a thought to God, not to speak of those who blaspheme his holy name whenever they think of it. Faced by this fact, the same people will say: "The First Commandment is impossible for the majority of men to observe. The indispensable conditions required for its possibility are wanting." They wrong God by saying that he commands us to do what is impossible. Our Lord, addressing the people in the Sermon on the Mount, said: "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."[1] Perfection is necessary for reaching heaven. If we do not acquire it willingly while on earth, we must be forced into doing so hereafter in Purgatory. But where are the souls on this earth who are perfect? Or how many are there who even strive after perfection? The same people will unfailingly conclude that our Lord addressed his exhortation to the chosen few. The just do not, generally speaking, possess the means of reaching perfection; they are nearly all condemned to pass through the flames of Purgatory. We have listened to S Alphonsus Liguori showing us that the grace of prayer is granted to all men without exception. All are able by its assistance to obtain the grace necessary

[1] Matt. v 48.

for salvation. And yet there are so very few persons who pray. Therefore, conclude the Jansenists, men have only sufficient grace which in reality is insufficient.

The sophism underlying these arguments can be seen by an example from ordinary life: Few men have been round the world, although this is an easy matter nowadays. We have heard a friend who had twice performed the task, urging a crowd of listeners to make the journey: "It is so instructive and agreeable and really does not cost very much! £400 would defray the expenses." But no one was persuaded to follow his suggestion. Would it be right for him to say: "The small number of those who have been round the world makes it clear that this is a privilege reserved for a favoured few. The railway and steamship companies select special travellers, and do not accept everyone"? The companies, of course, take anyone who pays the fare. If you have £400 to spend, yet stay at home, it is because you do not want to make the journey. It would be absurd to accuse the companies. You have only yourself and your preferences to blame. Similarly, it is absurd to accuse the Creator in order to find an excuse for the perversity of the creature. It suits our self-love and sloth to be able to say: "I am dispensed from this or that, and God does not require any more of me. He has his privileged souls, and I am not among their number." This excuse is absolutely untrue, so much the worse for ourselves, and thoughts such as these do not even free us from blame. It is the gravest injury against the infinite goodness of God, to attribute partiality to him in the matter of ordinary grace necessary for salvation. If we were concerned with ecstasy, rapture, and other extraordinary favours, which are in no sense indispensable for the soul that would reach heaven, then we would willingly recognize that God is free to bestow them as he wills, and to whom he wills. But we are speaking of the mere possibility of praying, of its facility, of a kind of prayer most efficacious in acquiring for us a great love of God, and furthering our perfection. We are all called to perfection, and we are all obliged to practise the

first commandment of the law; why, then, should we be refused a means of obeying it which is at once most easy and most efficacious? Moreover, when souls lose the power of meditation and affective prayer, how are they to succeed in their efforts to pray, if the prayer of faith is a privilege placed far beyond their reach?

S Teresa had no belief in this kind of privilege. Comparing contemplation to the fount of living water of which our Saviour spoke—"If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink"[1]—the saint wrote: "Remember, our Lord invited 'any man': he is truth itself; his word cannot be doubted. If *all* had not been included he would not have addressed everybody, nor would he have said: 'I will give you to drink.' He might have said: 'Let all men come, for they will lose nothing by it, and I will give to drink those I think fit for it.' But as he said unconditionally, 'If *any* man thirst, let him come to me,' I feel sure that, unless they stop half-way, none will fail to drink of this living water. May our Lord, who has promised to grant it us, give us grace to seek it as we ought for his sake."[2]

Since we wish to decide this delicate question on facts, we must discover the necessary conditions. And first of all to dispose of the large class of people who do not pray at all. Although they always have at their disposal the grace of prayer, they derive no benefit from it. It would be useless to examine whether the grace of contemplation may one day be offered to them. We must also put on one side the people who make short vocal prayers at rare intervals, without ever having attempted the practice of interior prayer. Finally, the question is not yet a practical one for persons who are just beginning to meditate. As long as they can excite the love of God in their hearts by reflecting on the truths of religion, the grace of prayer being bestowed upon them in this form, it is impossible to say whether later on God will offer it to them in a different way. But consider the souls who have devoted themselves to prayer for some length of time,

[1] John vii 37. [2] Ch. xix, Fr. Zimmerman's trans., p. 133.

whether in convents or in the world. Ask them whether they always have the inclination to meditate. Of every hundred to whom you put this question, ninety-nine will probably answer: "I used to have, but now unfortunately it is gone. Meditation has become a weariness to me. I cannot now find one good thought to touch my heart and fill it with the love of God. I am obliged to have a book continually in my hand. If I am struck by some thought it contains, I cease reading perhaps for a few seconds. Then I am harassed with distractions and must have recourse to reading to be freed from them." Continue your conversation and question them further: "Are you, at least, able to love God affcetionately, and so pray by offering him the loving sentiments of your heart?" "Alas!" is their frequent reply, "my heart is dry and devoid of every feeling; I am afraid to tell God that I love him, for my nature experiences a coldness and indifference that would give the lie to my words." "How, then, do you pray? Do you continue the practice?" When souls who have reached this difficult crisis are happy enough to be in a Carmelite or Visitation Convent, enlightened by the teaching of S Teresa, S John of the Cross, S Francis de Sales, and S Jane Frances de Chantal, they soon become contemplatives. We have quoted these saints affirming the fact, with very rare exceptions, of all their spiritual children. Some Carmelites make such progress in ordinary contemplation that they even experience rapture and ecstasy. The same is true in every case where the same conditions are verified. Otherwise we would have to say that God has reserved contemplation as an exclusive privilege for Carmelites, and Visitation Nuns, and for no one else, which could never be proved. If souls who have lost the power of meditation and affective prayer do not become contemplatives, this is not due to refusal on God's part, nor to perversity of will on the part of the subject, but it is the result of ignorance, and very often of prejudice imbibed from books devoid of true doctrine.

Happy are the unlettered folk who have been pre-

served from errors contained in such works. Thanks to their very simplicity they more easily come out victorious from the test, which is to lead them to the prayer of faith. Thus it is not unusual to find contemplative souls in a country place. There is a good example of it in the life of the Curé d'Ars. A good peasant used to pass considerable time in church adoring before the Tabernacle, and he never had a book in his hands. The holy curé had noticed him several times, and at last said to him: "How do you spend your time for so many long hours before the Blessed Sacrament?" The peasant answered: "I look at him, and he looks on me." Could the exercise of contemplation be described more concisely and in a more striking manner? Well, a great many of the humbler class of people pray in this way, as M. l'Abbé Saudreau judiciously observes in a note on p. 22 of *La vie d'union:* "Many people, who are in the state of union, do not know it themselves nor reveal the fact to others. They do not explain the manner in which God is acting upon them, and it often happens that their director himself has no suspicion as to the nature of the graces which are being showered upon them. Bossuet mentioned the same fact a long time before Saudreau. He says in so many words in the preface to his *Instruction on Prayer:* "A soul is in the contemplative state without reflecting that such is the case; and my own experience supports what I say." And he proceeds to give instances.

The number of contemplatives among educated people would certainly increase, if they only received the necessary instruction at the proper moment. The grace of contemplation is never denied them. What is so often wanting is the light which is necessary to enable them to correspond with the grace that is offered. As soon as they are instructed, they at once begin with joy to make the prayer of faith. Long experience has given us countless proofs of the truth of this fact. We must add in conclusion that the number of contemplatives is greatly diminished by the slackness of many souls. The prayer of faith, as we shall show later on,

is often a painful exercise requiring much patience, and they lack the courage to continue with it. But the very fact that these souls have received the grace of contemplation, and have profited by it, if only for a time, proves, in spite of their own infidelity, that it is not a grace reserved only for a chosen few.

CHAPTER XVI

SECURITY OF THE PRAYER OF FAITH

One result of presenting the prayer of faith as something extraordinary, has been to make people regard it as a kind of terrible mountain path bristling with every danger. Happily these perils exist entirely in the imagination; they are phantoms, like the scarecrows placed in orchards in order to protect the fruit from the ravages of birds. The birds with keen vision soon detect the make-up, and perch upon the heads of the figures, and quietly peck away under their very eyes, without the slightest fear. Our advice to pious souls is to do exactly the same, and in order to help them in dispelling their vain fears, we will examine one by one each of the supposed dangers lurking beneath the practice of contemplation.

First of all, the danger to the intellect. Some people pretend that the only thing resulting from mysticism is a diseased brain. It paves the way for illusion, and sometimes the height of folly. Now a mystical prayer is precisely one which does not require any brainwork at all. During meditation the mind is occupied with various reflections, and may very easily go astray. The prayer of faith, on the contrary, supposes for the moment a mental paralysis, as far as framing any particular idea is concerned. The intellectual faculties are left to themselves, and grace does not affect them at all. There are no reflections, no holy thought to assist the soul to pray. Everything takes place in the highest point of the intelligence. Once the act of faith in the presence of God is produced, all the work falls on the will alone, seeking union with God by acts of love. Further still: even the particular cognitions which come to us in a supernatural way, such as visions and revelations, must be excluded from this prayer. S John

of the Cross has devoted the whole of the Second Book of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* to showing how particular cognitions of this sort can never unite us with God. The soul must be detached from them, and generously renounce them all, in order to retire into the darkness of obscure faith, which alone is able to effect this union. He has written thirty-two chapters on this subject, in which he gives evidential proof of the necessity of this detachment. We will not deal with them here, as a summary of these chapters is given in our *Elucidation* of his works.

We put this question to every person of ordinary common sense: How can the brain be deranged when it does not act at all? How can we be misled by illusory ideas, when there is not one idea present? How can the mind be turned to foolish pursuits when it is resting in delightful repose? Who has ever acted like a madman while asleep? Only those go mad whose whirling brain makes sleep an impossibility. A spontaneous cessation of all reflection and all thought calms the mind, and makes it possible for it to listen attentively. Now this is the exact opposite of madness, for it is a characteristic of lunatics to be always agitated and incapable of listening to anything. The mind is merely reduced to a state of atrophy, which is very far indeed from anything approaching mental derangement. This momentary mental dullness is very useful for our humility, as it calls our attention to the weakness of our intellect. David experienced this state in crying out to God: "I am become as a beast before thee."[1] Learned men also pass through it, as Bossuet pointed out in the words we will quote later on in Chapter XIX. Far from becoming fools, they grow wiser as they increase in humility.

The second danger is concerned with the health. Mystic prayers, they say, become altogether too engrossing, and are liable to make people ill, etc. Here again the accusation misses its mark. With much more reason could this objection be urged against meditation or affective prayer, for in these we make use of

[1] Ps. lxxii 23.

faculties which very easily get tired out, and if we do not act with moderation, we may easily get into a dangerous condition. Thus long meditations may easily cause headache. Excessive emotion during affective prayer troubles the nervous system and may easily be the forerunner of disease. The person spoken of in Chapter VIII was in this state, and she became ill. Take S Francis as an example. The height of contemplation which he attained was often accompanied by the feelings which characterize affective prayer. This was particularly so when meditating on the Passion of our Lord. He was then powerless to lessen the ardour of his feelings, and gave himself up to them for several hours at a stretch. He thus eventually lost his sight. Souls who, like S Francis, have received the gift of tears are always liable to a similar fate, but they have an excuse in the extraordinary favour which God has bestowed upon them. But when we are not the recipients of this favour, we are on an entirely wrong path if we try to force tears, at whatever cost, under pretext of making a better affective prayer.

But there is no danger like this to be feared in the prayer of faith, since during its exercise we employ neither senses nor intellectual faculties. Of course, if we wanted to pray day and night without allowing time to eat and sleep, we would certainly become ill. But our illness would then be the result of privation of food and sleep, not the result of the prayer of faith. This manner of prayer is in itself extremely restful. When S Francis at the house of Bernard of Quintavalle spent the whole night exclaiming: "*Deus meus et omnia:* My God and my all," he may have worn out his bodily strength by not giving sufficient time to sleep, but he could not have made his head ache with the force of his reflections, simply because he did not have any reflections. Nor did he draw upon his sense energies, for this cry of love came direct from the will, without drawing tears and groans from his bodily organs, as was the case in his prayer on the Passion. Notice carefully the complex phenomena of our physical and moral nature. All our forces, except those of the will,

wear out with continued action, and we soon experience the need of giving them rest. The heart, on the contrary, becomes wearied when left inactive. It grows torpid, cold, and anæmic. If you wish to restore its vitality, set it working once more. The more it acts, the more its energy and exuberance increase. For it never grows tired of loving and being loved, and the more it loves, the happier it is. But as the will is dependent for its activity on a body which has many needs, such as food and sleep, we are bound to respect these needs. Once they are properly satisfied, the will can devote itself to loving without measure, and can do so for many hours in succession, without pain or effort, experiencing all the time the sweetness of every delight.

Some people hesitate to repeat these words: "My God, I love thee." They fear that they do not mean what they say. The reason is that they confuse spiritual love with the sensible feeling of it. It would not be sincere to declare our love for a person to whom we have a natural antipathy, for we would then mean a natural kind of love. But we are sincere when we say to God in the prayer of faith: "I love thee," since God is then asking from us a love of the will. We have this love from the very fact that we will it, for the will is not able at the same moment to wish and not to wish. Get rid, then, of this scrupulosity, and say to God again and again with a loyal heart: "I love thee," and you may thus prolong your prayer for an indefinite period. It is by prolonging this exercise of love that a state of perfect quietude is attained, and even rapture and ecstasy. The prayer then becomes miraculous. But although it does not depend on any effort of ours, we have made it possible by removing the obstacles which prevent God from pouring upon our souls the torrents of his divine love. S Peter of Alcantara probably had this in mind when he said that it was impossible to make a perfect prayer, unless it was continued for at least two consecutive hours.

There is another supposed danger. Mystical prayer fosters a distaste for the ordinary life of the community, and leads to singularity and strange ways of acting,

which cause surprise and scandal to our neighbour. This is a reproach frequently levelled against people devoted to prayer, but is unmerited by souls who practise contemplation. In this kind of prayer the formation of particular desires is carefully avoided, and the soul is content with a general desire to be united with God, by a loving obedience to everything that he wishes. No special request is made except those of the "Our Father" or similar petitions. The soul loves as the blessed do in heaven, and is prepared to prove to God the sincerity of its love by obeying him in everything. But the details of this obedience do not concern it at all. God has determined the manner in which it is to obey, by the commands of superiors, and the ordinary duties of the day, etc., and that is enough. The soul gives attention to these details when the prayer is finished, and quietly accepts the manifestations of the will of God in their due proportion, without striving to modify them by any preconceived notions of its own. Where is the singularity in that? If it ever exists, it will be the result of the force of circumstances, not of the prayer of faith.

We will call attention to one last source of security of exceptional value. The prayer of faith is the most efficacious means of diverting and overcoming the temptations of the devil. If the temptations which arise from our corrupt nature, or the perverse attractions of the world, often find our will too weak to offer any resistance, it is because the devil is always at hand, carefully watching these temptations, keeping them continually before our mind, and making them well-nigh irresistible by his own evil inspiration. Freed from his influence, it would be easier to overcome the world and the flesh. Well, the prayer of faith is in direct opposition to the influence of the devil. S John of the Cross teaches us this consoling truth. According to him, it is quite easy for the devil to read our thoughts from the impressions which they make upon the brain, just as we may read a person's thought from the expression of his countenance. When he knows our thoughts, he adds his own to them; he twists our

judgement and ends by inclining our will to that which is evil. Now when the soul devotes itself to the prayer of faith, no particular idea is dwelt upon, and the brain ceases to be impressed by the images which always accompany mental reflection. The brain becomes unreadable, just like the expression of people who are accustomed to conceal what they are thinking about. The devil searches it in vain, and in spite of the closest scrutiny, is unable to discover anything. The soul has completely escaped him. "What are its thoughts? Has it given consent to any of the evil thoughts that I have been suggesting?" His search is an absolute failure. The soul is hidden in God. Faith envelops it as with a thick cloud. It is impossible for the devil to enter into it. "This contemplation," says Bossuet, "takes place in the inmost recesses of the heart, in that deep place where God has imprinted his image, *where the devil can see nothing*, and where the soul entirely recollected in God *offers no vantage-point to the attacks of the enemy.*"[1] Then, if the prayer of faith is continued for any length of time, the devil becomes discouraged and departs. The temptation is ended, and the soul on rising from prayer can quietly occupy itself with various duties, without fear of disturbance either of mind or body. If it had this advantage alone, the prayer of faith should stir up holy desires in our soul. Since God generously bestows it on all souls of good will, put aside all vain fears; rather study with care its nature and characteristics, so that when the Holy Ghost deigns to favour us with this gift, we may faithfully correspond with the grace offered to us.

[1] *Instr.*, Bk. VI, § 41.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ACTS DURING THE PRAYER OF FAITH

At first, the souls whom the Holy Spirit is drawing to obscure contemplation are entirely baffled by the complete silence they feel within them. They have been accustomed to stir up in the mind a number of beautiful thoughts, in order by that means to raise their soul to God. They would excite many feelings of love in their hearts, and transform them into desires and explicit petitions. Now there is an end to all this. On the contrary, the imagination often wanders astray, and the senses experience a distaste which draws them far away from prayer. The will alone is bent on God. But what can it do by itself? The fear arises that nothing is being done and time wasted. This fear is deceptive. Bossuet clears up our ideas concerning the acts of which the will is capable, when deprived of the assistance of the mental and bodily faculties: "Since our soul," he says, "is always enveloped in sensible images, which entirely fill and penetrate its very being, it makes no distinction whatever between itself and the body, being aware of its own existence only in a confused kind of way—by consciousness, as it is called; and by a necessary consequence, the movements of which it is most ignorant are its own intellectual acts. The reason of this is because it sees nothing except through the heavy cloud of corporeal objects, which are continually reaching it through the channels of sense. It therefore forms the habit of thinking in some way, that nothing has any reality which cannot be felt, touched, and handled. Whence it comes about that, as soon as the soul applies itself to pure intellectual acts in the state of mystic prayer, it thinks that it no longer has any operation, whereas it is only just beginning to exercise in the truest sense its real natural

operation. But if it perseveres in the prayer of faith, or obscure contemplation, *from the very fact that it is thrown so entirely upon its own resources*, the soul begins to disentangle itself from the body, and by that means learns to separate its intellectual operations, which are really such, from those that are connected with things of sense."[1]

The acts of the soul become simplified when separated from things of sense, and it is difficult at first to be convinced of their existence. In contemplation, moreover, these acts are still direct. They come straight from the heart to God, without being expressed in discourse and reasoning. Finally, they are not even reflected upon. The mind which took no part in forming them does not observe their action. They pass before its eyes unnoticed. So much for the things which disturb beginners, and make them fearful of remaining idle in the presence of God. Later on, in Chapter XIX, we will give two passages from Bossuet, dealing with petitions made during the prayer of faith, which are well calculated to deliver souls from their alarm on this subject. A comparison used by many writers will be very useful for the same purpose. Imagine a mother seated by the side of a cradle, and gazing upon her sleeping infant. She does not make the least movement or the slightest noise for fear of awaking him; she even holds her breath. Full of love for the fruit of her womb, she fixes her eyes immovably upon him, and remains thus for a considerable time. What are her thoughts? What are the feelings at the bottom of her heart? If you afterwards question her on the subject, she will be greatly embarrassed, and generally will not know how to answer. She will tell you: "I was full of love for my little child, and that was all." When a soul makes the prayer of loving attention to the presence of God, exactly the same thing takes place. It loves God with simplicity and in silence. That is all it knows, but its knowledge is firm and certain. It was not asleep nor was it idle; it did not willingly consent to the wanderings of imagination,

[1] Quoted by Père de Caussade, *Instr. sp.*, I, Dial. 5.

nor was it dejected and discouraged by the distaste and weariness it experienced. On the contrary, a fervent love was all the time burning in its heart. But put no further questions as to what was passing in the soul. If perchance the time had been spent in self-reflection, instead of in contemplation of the divine Majesty; if self-examination and introspection had been the soul's only care, then indeed it would be possible to give some account of what had taken place. But since there were no reflective acts, there was also no consciousness of their occurrence; the soul had no knowledge of them, and therefore was not in a position to explain their nature.

This mental paralysis, arising from the complete silence essential to the practice of contemplation, in no way proves that the will was inactive and wasting time. Otherwise we would have to say as much of the mother watching by the side of her child. The will is acting in a very real way; often several acts are joined together in one movement of the heart, in which case it is difficult to furnish a detailed analysis. Bossuet calls this state one of united action—*des actes englotés:* "These acts of mystic prayer," he says, "are centred upon the heart, with the charity which believes all things, hopes all things, suffers all things, asks all things, and when the time arrives, actualizes all the potential movements it possesses."[1] Bossuet did not invent the expression "united action," for Cassian had remarked long before him: "In the prayer of faith all the feelings are united together in one simple movement *conglobatis sensibus.*" Bossuet explains his meaning from the case of a Visitation Nun: "Sister Anne-Marie Rosset possessed all the affections of which a Christian soul is capable, united and welded one with another, and all directed to one end, thus forming one harmonious whole. The reason was that this holy religious endeavoured to dispose her soul from day to day, in the same actual state of simple abandonment into the hands of God. But as particular desires used to be stirred up in her heart in great abundance, without

[1] De Caussade, I, Dial. 5.

her ever having the consolation of finding any one of them sufficient to satisfy her, she united them all in one great act of self-abandonment, where previously there had been innumerable specified acts. This is how prayer is made by one simple yet actual disposal of the heart, which endures longer and is more easily preserved in some souls than many acts of a passing nature."[1]

It is a wound to our self-love to be unable to follow in detail the acts of the prayer of faith, but so much the better. The essential thing is that God sees and accepts them. He is well pleased with this manner of prayer and cannot be deaf to its petitions. Bossuet assures us of this in his commentary on the Psalms: "The psalmist reduced the acts of the heart to their utmost simplicity when he said: 'The Lord hath heard the desire of the poor: thy ear hath heard the preparation of their heart.'[2] As soon as the soul begins to be disturbed and moved, and before it has time to find adequate expression for its action, God sees it in the inmost recesses of the heart, and listens to it there. As David again says: 'I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin.'[3] What wonderful conciseness! I have said: I will confess; I have not yet done so, but I have made the resolution and prepared my heart. He does not say: 'and thou *wilt* forgive,' as if God must first hear the confession uttered before he forgives the sin, but he says: 'Thou hast forgiven.' On God's part the act is finished and done with: 'Thou hast forgiven.' God has forgiven before we gave actual expression to the confession of our fault. Thus before the mind formed any express idea, God already listened to the firm resolution of a soul determined to admit and correct the sin, before it even gave a thought to uttering this purpose in so many words. How often do we say within ourselves: 'I will pray to God about this matter,' and the prayer is already made from that very moment. We often stand in God's presence like

[1] De Caussade, I, Dial. 12. [2] Ps. ix 17.
[3] Ps. xxxi 5.

a beggar who does not dare to make his request, for fear of being reckoned unworthy; but that petition which we have not the courage to put into explicit terms, is already made by the secret intention of the heart. God sees the fruit which has already begun to form in the blossom, and he hears the petition in the intention of the soul to make it."[1] At the same time, the acts of contemplation are not entirely imperceptible. When the habit of this prayer is formed, they are more easily discernible. We will examine some of them because of their special importance.

[1] De Caussade, *ibid.*, I, Dial. 5.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIRST ACT IN THE PRAYER OF FAITH

As the name indicates, the first act in the prayer of faith, with which it must always begin, is one of faith. We mean a general faith in God, in his presence in the soul, and in his infinite perfections, not a specified act of faith in any one truth of religion: "My God, I believe in thee. I feel thee here present. O Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I do not seek to see thee face to face, for this is not possible on this earth. I am satisfied to feel thee near me. I believe thee to be what thou art, what thou knowest thyself to be, and what thou hast revealed to thy Church; it is only necessary for me to remain in silence before thee, in order to adore and love thee." Contemplation begins with a simple act of this kind, often expressed by a momentary gaze without noise of words. The mind makes it without an elaborate process, and is satisfied with placing the soul in the presence of God, enveloped in darkness, leaving the rest of the prayer entirely to the work of the heart.

In dealing with the practical exercise of the prayer of faith, we repeat what we have already said more than once: When the Holy Spirit raises the soul to the contemplative state, it is deprived of all power of meditating. Each time it is invited to pray, the intelligence is found to be devoid of every good thought. Reflections and reasonings which at other times would be so advantageous to the soul, now appear distasteful to it. It has to be content with a general obscure faith, by which it believes in God's presence and is drawn to his love. A modern author has a difficulty on this point: "For what reason should God impose one thought only, when there are so many others just as expedient? Why put obstacles in the way of former excellent

methods of prayer, and fill their place with one exercise which appears to be insufficient for its purpose?" God, of course, as this author well knows, could act in this way in order to excite the soul to a love, for which he will supply both the need and the attraction. But God has another motive in view, which is to purify and strengthen the soul's faith, and make it so general and comprehensive as to be unassailable.

S John of the Cross when teaching souls, in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, the means of attaining divine union, lays down as an essential foundation a complete detachment of the will, not only from natural pleasures but also from *supernatural*, inasmuch as self-love may become attached to them. Revealed truth is a thing of the supernatural order. We have to believe it with firm, unshakable faith. We have also to meditate upon it. This is our bounden duty, but it does not authorize us to allow our self-love to become attached to the truths of revelation; to make them our own and use them for our personal advantage, and the satisfaction of our pride, vanity, or any other interest.

Perversity of this kind has always been present in the Church from its infancy. How did every heresy and sect take its rise? By the undue attachment of self-love to some particular aspect of revealed truth. And how was this dangerous attachment fostered? Surely not in the prayer of faith, which excludes all remembrance of particular truths. No, study, and very often meditation, was the cause of it. When a certain Bishop was told that some of his ideas had been condemned by a Council of the Church, he answered: "Such light has been shed on these very truths during my prayer, that I will never submit to this Council's decisions. And even if the episcopate of the entire world were at one in regard to this decision, I would still retain my own belief." If pride makes us adhere to doctrines which the Church has declared to be contrary to faith, then we are heretics. If the Church merely censures them and advises us in a different way, our refusal to be counselled does not make us heretics, but it makes for the formation of parties and schools, which is fatal

to Catholic unity. In both these cases we may be certain that those who have been misled into this fatal line of action, have never practised the prayer of faith. When they meditate it is to rack their brain in order to discover new arguments to confirm their way of looking at things, for they wish to be in the right at whatever cost. When they pray, it is, like the Pharisees, to think only of themselves, to glorify themselves in God's sight, to beg for a successful issue to their plans, to become still more pleased with their own ideas, and still more strongly attached to them.

How different is the attitude of those souls who make the prayer of faith. They ardently love the truth which is contained in God and is God himself, and desire to receive it in its entirety with a humble faith, full of adoration and love. But they think themselves profoundly unworthy of receiving a direct revelation of any particular truth. They clearly see that the divine wisdom, in teaching men the truths necessary for their salvation, had to take means by which that truth could be reached with an absolute certainty. Consequently a doctrinal authority had to be established with divine assistance for the prevention of error. What would become of revealed doctrine, if everyone could pretend to receive it directly from God, and assume the right of interpreting it in his own particular fashion? Where would there be any unity of belief? And without unity of mind how acquire unity of heart? How could that perfect charity, which should be the distinctive mark of Christians, ever reign upon the earth? There is a very vivid realization of all these things during the prayer of faith. The mind, full of religious reverence, feels the need of submitting to some doctrinal authority representing God upon earth. Peter is that authority, and Jesus Christ promised to him and to his successors: "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not; and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren."[1] Then the soul makes the firm resolution not to adhere to any particular truth of revelation, until it has been determined by the successor of S Peter. It

[1] Luke xxii 32.

is the very wisdom of God that is adored with the utmost reverence in the magisterium of the Church. The soul submits its own judgement, not only to infallible decisions on matters of faith, but also to non-infallible direction and counsel. This internal detachment, anterior to the definition of a truth by the Church, is accompanied by a firm adhesion to dogmatic truths, which are held with a strong and courageous love able to withstand even the test of martyrdom.

Such is the all-important reason why the Holy Spirit permits only one thought to hold possession of the mind during the practice of obscure contemplation: the simple reflection on the presence of God and his infinite perfections. At other times the soul is free to meditate on religious truths, but not during contemplation. God purifies the faith of the soul in this way; he frees it from the attachment of self-love to any particular thing; he firmly establishes it in a general faith by which it accepts all divine truth, as a whole, without any distinction or reserve, as God makes it known by the mouth of his representative.

We are perfectly convinced that all men may gradually attain to this perfect faith, if they faithfully correspond with the grace of prayer. The Lord in his infinite mercy never refuses to anyone the grace of being able to pray. Pagans, Jews, Mohammedans, heretics, and schismatics, all receive it. The first act of correspondence with grace should be a prayer for light. Like S Paul struck down on the road to Damascus, the soul which prays in sincerity of heart will say: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" If the prayer is persevered in, Jesus will answer as he did to S Paul: "Arise, and go into the city, and there it shall be told thee what thou must do."[1] How could a soul profoundly conscious of its own weakness, ignorance, and unworthiness, have the effrontery to oblige God to instruct it himself, without intermediary, in all the truths necessary for its salvation? Prayer well made will convey the intimate conviction that God has provided for man's salvation by revealing a certain

[1] Acts ix 7.

amount, and that the rest must be sought for where God has placed it. When a soul is once convinced of this, God comes to its assistance by some act of providence by which it is led into the Church. According to S Thomas, if an infidel were well prepared at heart, yet lacked the knowledge necessary for salvation, God would send an angel to his assistance rather than allow him to perish. But the intervention of angels is rarely necessary, for God has a thousand ways open to him for bestowing light on those whose heart is in the right direction, according to the words of the psalmist: "*Exortum est in tenebris lumen rectis.*"[1]

Such is the way followed in the conversion of infidels. Prayer well made leads them to the Faith. If they persevere, they dispose themselves for the simple untrammelled faith of contemplatives, which receives all the teaching of the Church as a whole, and is for them faith already begun. Thus every day, numbers of poor souls, providentially brought into contact with the Church, dispel their errors and arrive at the fullness of truth. If people who have gone astray into heresy or a false religion pray daily without ever arriving at the complete light of Catholic faith, the reason is that in their prayers they do not endeavour to become detached from particular ideas of their own, in order to accept blindly the whole body of truth revealed by God. When outside the time of prayer they look at revealed truth in detail, they are held back by prejudice and wander about on the road. Their prayer has been imperfect. They have not acquired that general faith practised in obscure contemplation. We may be quite certain of this fact: When souls of this kind practise meditation, they devote themselves to reasoning which attaches them more and more firmly to their previous error. This attachment is their destruction, for the prayer they make, instead of leading them to the true faith, draws them further and further away from it, and confirms them in their blindness.

As regards Catholics, if they succeed during contemplation in becoming detached from all special fancies of

[1] Ps. cxi 4.

their own, their faith will be simple and obedient. When the doctrinal authority speaks, they will not twist its teaching to suit their own particular views. They will leave the task of explaining the meaning of its words to the authority which framed them. Thus there will be unity in belief and an end to sectarian movements. All then united in heart and soul by the bond of obedience, will form one powerful army to fight and triumph in the cause of God.

CHAPTER XIX

OTHER ACTS IN THE PRAYER OF FAITH

THOSE who systematically oppose the prayer of faith say that it leads to neglect of virtue. This is not true. In obscure contemplation the virtues are put in their proper place, by being all subordinated to the pure and perfect charity which guides them. A virtuous life is of very small value if it is not employed for the glory of God. Cassian refers to this in his 23rd Conference: "What is that good to which every other good must be sacrificed? It is the one and only thing, divine contemplation. Although the virtues of the saints are good and useful for the present life, and even for eternity, yet, compared with divine contemplation, they appear vile and perishable."[1] Moreover, the infallible means of perfecting virtue is to make it proceed from divine charity as its source, since according to S Paul it is this which perfects every virtue.[2] Père Surin makes the same remark: "Souls do not become perfect by embracing a life of virtue, but in perfecting a virtuous life by divine charity."[3] During the prayer of faith, the soul is not concerned with the petty details of every virtue, although outside the time of prayer it by no means neglects their practice. But the love of God, to which it is ardently devoted all the time, encourages during contemplation certain general virtues, which co-operate with charity in perfecting the state of the soul.

The first of these virtues is obedience. Since every kind of virtue comes from submission to God's commands, that virtue which inclines one to obey him

[1] Saudreau, *La vie d'union*, p. 104, note. In Chapter XXIV. another text from Cassian is given which explains and completes this one.

[2] Col. iii 14.

[3] *Love of God*, Bk. I, c. ix.

always, everywhere, and in everything, without hesitation, reflection, or reserve, but with the greatest love and joy—that virtue cannot fail to embrace every other. The soul is prepared to practise them all, whenever occasion demands, and it will do so carefully, courageously, and perfectly. Now during the prayer of faith, this virtue of obedience is practised the whole time. Bossuet, in speaking of the prayer of faith, has the following words:[1] "What I do assert of this prayer is that God teaches us in the school of the heart, where he makes himself heard in the most perfect tranquillity and quiet. It seems indeed that this prayer, by its very simplicity, is perceived more in its effects than in itself, and the chief of these effects is that the soul remains *pliable and supple* in the hand of God, because it has experienced by its own weakness the truth of these words: 'Without me you can do nothing.'[2] Hence what it chiefly does is to hold the soul pliable and supple in the hand of God. How deep is the meaning of these words, and what a lesson for those who have learnt it well! For in these words the soul realizes that it has acquired during its prayer the flexible docility of a child, obedient to the least indication of the will of God, and the slightest inspiration of the Holy Spirit, whether urging it to shun vice or practise virtue. What strides does an obedient soul thus make in every virtue."[3]

The obedient submission of our soul to the commandments of God removes every obstacle to the practice of virtue, but that alone is not sufficient. We need the assistance of divine grace, without which we can do no supernatural act worthy of a heavenly reward. Now it is humility which draws grace down upon the soul, as we pointed out in Chapter IV. And no prayer so increases our humility, and our progress in self-denial and detachment, as obscure contemplation. The whole time may be passed in saying: "My God, what art thou, and what am I? Thou art everything, and I am nothing."

[1] *Inst. Past.*, vii, 16. [2] John xv 5.
[3] De Caussade, I, Dial. 8.

Here again Bossuet may speak for himself in a quotation by Père de Caussade: "How is it that a soul, formerly headstrong and rebellious, suddenly becomes so supple and pliable that God can do whatever he likes with it, and turn it about as he wills? It is because its very powerlessness has made it experience the truth of these words: 'Without me you can do nothing.' We may have sufficient knowledge of this truth by faith and reason, and yet possess none of that true humility of heart, and perfect distrust of self, together with an entire confidence in God, which are the chief means of attaining perfection. The soul obtains a deep appreciation of all these things, according to the degree in which it understands these truths. On the one hand, there is a strong inclination to evil, and powerlessness to do good, under the weight of which it would instantly give way, were it not assisted by the special help of God. On the other hand, besides this special divine aid, it is conscious at every turn of an interior force and vigour which, in spite of its weakness, makes it capable of doing and suffering all things for God's sake."[1] . . . "God leads learned men, as well as others, by this secret path. He thus makes them as weak as he pleases, and they themselves are conscious only of their weakness and blindness. . . . Thus are souls rebuffed and their vanity ridiculed, by the experience of prayer which is full of darkness, confusion, and weakness; the mind, reason, will, and entire man seem to be destroyed, '*Ut jumentum factus sum apud te.*'"[2]

Patience is another general virtue which prepares the way for all the rest. Thus, according to S James, "patience hath a perfect work."[3] How is it that we fall into sin and negligence? It is because duty is a painful task, and to fulfil it we must endure suffering, and give up all the pleasures of which we are so fond . . . and we give way to temptation. A courageous patient soul experiences with equal indifference both joy and sorrow. Now this patience may be acquired by

[1] De Caussade, I, Dial. 8. [2] *Ibid.*, Dial. 12.
[3] Jas. i 4.

fidelity to the practice of obscure contemplation. We may learn this from S Jane Frances de Chantal, whom Père Caussade puts forth both as a teacher and an example of this subject. In her commentary upon the rules, constitutions, and customary observance, she wrote as follows: "Souls who are in this way frequently find themselves filled with distractions, and devoid of any visible help. Our Lord takes away from them the sweet feeling of his presence, and every kind of interior light, and leaves them powerless, with their senses, as it were, paralysed. Not a few, who have experienced this for the first time, are astonished and disturbed. But they should remain firm and trustful in God, no matter what they may experience or feel, suffering, accepting, and cherishing every path by which God leads them, and every operation which he pleases to work in them, sacrificing and abandoning themselves unreservedly to his merciful providence, without seeing or wishing to see what they are doing or what they ought to do. But over and above their own experience and knowledge, they should be joined to God in the highest point of their intelligence, and be lost entirely in him. They will thus find peace in the midst of war, and rest in the midst of labour. In short, we must remain in the state in which God places us: patient in trial, and long-suffering in pain. It is a certain sign of a good prayer, when it is fruitful in real virtue, and when the soul is unswervingly faithful in every good work, in desolation and bitterness as well as in the enjoyment of divine favours and consolation."[1]

What patience is required to persevere in a prayer so full of suffering! Many souls, alas! give up the practice because they are not courageous in suffering, and undergo weariness in the company of God. This is a fact experienced by many saints and directors of souls. S Jane Frances de Chantal practised what she taught her spiritual children. In a reply sent to a superior of her congregation, she says: "I am filled with confusion when you ask me to describe my prayer. It is generally little more than distraction and suffering.

[1] *Instr. sp.*, I, Dial. 12.

What can a poor weak mind like mine do, filled as it is with every kind of business? I tell you with confidence and simplicity, that for nearly twenty years God has deprived me of the power of praying by means of consideration or meditation. All I can do is to suffer and abandon my mind with great simplicity into the hands of God, keeping close to his operation with complete cessation of my own activity, doing nothing except when moved by his impulse, waiting calmly for whatever his divine goodness is pleased to bestow upon me."[1]

Thus obscure contemplation is a courageous exercise of faith, submission to the will of God, humility and patience. Yet people dare to say that it does not encourage the practice of virtue! What meditation has ever caused the practice of so many important virtues? Nor is this all. It remains for us to speak of charity, which should be the fruit of every kind of prayer; we will proceed to show what exceptional opportunities of acquiring this virtue are offered by the prayer of faith.

[1] *Instr. sp.*, I, Dial. 12.

CHAPTER XX

CHARITY IN THE PRAYER OF FAITH

The teaching contained in the foregoing chapters ought to have enlightened us sufficiently on this subject; for we have said repeatedly that contemplation begins by faith and continues by charity. It is a long and courageous practice of it. We have also called the prayer of faith *a prayer of loving attention to the presence of God.* But it frequently happens that good, pious people have the most erroneous ideas on the nature of charity. They think they are obliged to love God as they love creatures. If they do not feel sympathetic and tender emotions within them, but rather the contrary, they fear that they do not love God, and become discouraged in their endeavour to seek his company in prayer.

The prayer of faith is made with the express purpose of dispelling these errors. It rectifies people's ideas, and leads them in the way of pure and true love, the love which God requires; it helps them to strengthen charity and carry it to the highest perfection. God, who is pure Spirit, cannot be satisfied with the gross manifestation of corporeal love. We must offer him a spiritual love which comes from the will, unfettered by the things of sense, and led by the light of reason and faith. The rules of this love are contained in the three first petitions of the "Our Father." The mind is convinced of the grandeur of God. It sees him placed infinitely above the plane of creatures, and the will offers to him a love of praise: *Sanctificetur nomen tuum.* God is not only infinitely great; he is beautiful and lovable; he possesses the beauty which the union of every perfection supplies; he is, above all, good and merciful to his creatures. He is, then, worthy of reigning in our hearts by love, and our will beseeches him to come and enter into possession of this kingdom:

Adveniat regnum tuum. Finally, God is omnipotent, the Lord and absolute Master of all his creatures. None of them have the right, nor indeed the power, of successfully resisting him. Filled with holy respect, the will submits to this sovereign authority: *Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in coelo et in terra.* This is the love of obedience.

As long as our will is enslaved by passions which disturb the flesh, and by thoughts which fill the mind with corporeal things, the soul can never be raised to these lofty heights. God renders it a priceless service by granting it the grace of contemplation. By that means he rescues it from the wanderings of imagination, and the weakness of the senses. The will is made independent of the body. In the midst of darkness of mind and dryness of heart, the will recovers its self-possession and becomes master of itself. It then makes its decisions in the pure light of reason, enlightened by the divine wisdom with which the love of God has filled it. Remember the well-known answer of S Thomas Aquinas to his sister. She asked him: "What must I do in order to become a saint?" "You must desire it." "But what must I do after that, in order to attain to sanctity?" "You must desire it." She made the request a third time, and for the third time he replied in exactly the same way. How many there are who do not know how to use their will at all. They toss about like wreckage at the mercy of the waves, and never attain any definite object. Others do reach their end through the energetic effort of their will. But it is a will under the influence of blind passion, love of wealth, ambition, vanity, etc. The will must also be brought into play in order to reach God, but it must be a will entirely detached, and firmly fixed upon the ardours of divine love. The will is shaped into this condition by the practice of the prayer of faith, and if this prayer is persevered in, the soul will gradually progress in the path of perfection.

S John of the Cross having drawn a picture, in *The Spiritual Canticle*, of a soul's progress in contemplation, concludes by describing its state when perfectly

prepared to receive the reward of its merits: "The Bride perceives that the desire of her will is now detached from all things, resting upon God with most fervent love; that the sensitive part of the soul, with all its powers, faculties, and desires, is now conformed to the spirit; that all rebellion is quelled for ever; that Satan is overcome and driven far away in the varied contest of the spiritual struggle; that her soul is united and transformed in the rich abundance of the heavenly gifts; and that she herself is now prepared, confirmed in strength, apparelled, 'leaning upon her beloved,' to go up 'by the desert' of death; full of joy in the glorious throne of her espousals and of eager desire for the conclusion of her nuptials."[1]

This love of God would be insincere, if it were not also manifested by a pure and perfect love for one's neighbour. Here again our mental and bodily powers are an obstacle in the way. We live in the midst of creatures, and through seeing and coming so much in contact with them, the most lasting, and at the same time the most diverse impressions are produced in us. To some we are attracted by the most ardent sympathy, but others we loathe with antipathy, disgust, and even hatred. How are we to love both the one and the other with the same love of charity? And first of all, do we at least understand in what this love consists? To practise it will be impossible if we do not even know its nature, and, above all, we must have accurate ideas on this point. Otherwise, with the best possible intentions, we would be giving ourselves up to all kinds of exterior work, in which charity, although apparently the inspiring motive, has not in reality the slightest place. Our Lord did not wish to leave us in ignorance on this important subject. In the Old Law it was written: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But men have various ways of loving themselves, and very often this love is evil in nature. Which way are they to follow in order to obey the commandment? To leave no room for doubt, Jesus Christ said to his disciples: "A new commandment I give unto you: that

[1] *Spirit. Cant.*, Stanza xl. Works, ii, p. 210.

you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another."[1]

This, then, is the simple rule to follow, a rule of clear meaning. But it must be carefully studied, if we wish to keep it in all its fulness. Everyone knows this truth in a general kind of way: Jesus Christ has not been selfish. He demanded of men neither money, service, honours, nor pleasures. He gave nothing of this kind to them. He was good, and to gain their hearts rendered them every willing service, even to the extent of working miracles. But he looked still higher than this. He loved us in order to make us like to him; to deliver us from sin and vice; to save us from hell and lead us to heaven. That is the scope and the essence of his love, at the dictates of which he sacrificed everything. He shed his blood and gave his life for our sake, and he continues to do so until the end of the world, in the Church and the holy sacraments.

How are we to understand the meaning of this love in order to make it our rule of conduct? Meditation, of course, is useful, but contemplation is ever so much more efficacious for attaining this end. The object contemplated may be either the Blessed Trinity or the Incarnate Son of God. In the latter case it does not end with the actions and works of charity done by Jesus Christ; it enters into his adorable heart, and admires this charity at its very source. Meditation on the example of our Lord, if made with true humility of heart, may discover for us the perfect rule of virtue set for our imitation. But we must never forget this fact: there is engrained in us a self-love of the most subtle kind, the source very often of the most fallacious reasoning. How are we to escape being blinded by passion, once we allow our minds to be influenced by this sophistry? Very often it conceals the path of duty, by drawing us away from true love of our neighbour to something which appears to be the same, but is in reality the mere satisfaction of our natural needs. For example, very few souls arrive by the way of medi-

[1] John xiii 34.

tation at a true understanding, and a practical following out, of the great duty of forgiving injuries and loving our enemies. We have known instances. Pious souls would meditate on the Passion of our Lord. They would be filled with admiration when, on the Cross, he forgave his murderers and prayed for their conversion. Then turning to themselves, all the injuries they had suffered would come before their mind. Yet far from forgetting all about them, they would, under specious pretexts, keep bitter feelings alive in their heart, even after pardon had been asked from them. Was not S Jane Frances de Chantal in this condition when faced with her husband's murderer, until S Francis de Sales helped her to make some progress in prayer? Certainly, her love of God was too great to allow her to nourish feelings in her heart which were displeasing to him. But for a long time she could not bear the sight of the man who had made her a widow. This was an excusable weakness of nature, but it was nevertheless a weakness over which she triumphed magnificently, as soon as a more perfect state of prayer had strengthened her love for our divine Lord.

It is contemplation which helps the progress of souls who have these frailties and feelings of resentment. It gives them courage to forget everything. It opens for them the interior of the heart of Jesus, and makes them admire the height, and depth, and breadth of his immense love for all men. They thus find it impossible to think of self, and forgetful of every personal interest, they devote themselves to love souls as Jesus loved them.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRAYER OF FAITH

"Not all those," says S John of the Cross, "who resolutely devote themselves to the interior life are drawn by God through the channel of the mind to a state of perfect contemplation. The reason why, God alone knows." Following the example set by this great saint, we do not endeavour to probe into the secrets of God. He is free to choose his own way of reaching the soul, in order to take possession of it, and raise it to a state of perfect love. In heaven there will be equality between love and knowledge, but in this world that equality does not exist. There is knowledge without love, as in theologians who do not pray but lead a life of sin; and there is the love which surpasseth knowledge, as in simple country-folk who have reached the greatest sanctity. This is the state in the prayer of faith, where love is ardent and immense, although knowledge remains always obscure. Why is it not the same with souls who all their life follow the way of meditation? Why does not their love immeasurably surpass the clear and distinct cognition which enlightens their intelligence? If we are concerned with a practical love, the thing is not very surprising. Even in the natural order we frequently meet people of the most refined sensibility, always ready to utter affectionate words and make fine promises, and just as ready to forget all about them, simply because they are wanting in the energy which is essential for the practice of good. Others, on the contrary, are naturally cold and reserved; they speak little but do much. Their affection has no charm about it, but, at the same time, it is immensely preferable to the affection which goes no further than shadowy protestations. It is the same in the order of grace. Some contemplatives have not the

energy to show by practical conduct the heights of love they have attained during prayer. On the other hand, souls who remain in the way of meditation do not experience the love of contemplative souls, but they possess much greater powers for the practice of virtue.

In this world a strong and courageous love of God, finding expression in acts of virtue, is the one thing necessary. That alone will be the substance and measure of our eternal reward. Everything else is secondary, as S Paul teaches us when he says: "Charity never falleth away: whether prophecies shall be made void, or tongues shall cease, or knowledge shall be destroyed. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. . . . We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known. And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity."[1] S Teresa also exhorts souls not to be discouraged, if God never grants to them the grace of contemplation. It is enough for them to remain in the way of meditation, and to keep well this essential rule: reflect on the truths of religion not to become more learned, but to acquire a greater love and courage in the service of almighty God.

These souls are not free from dryness of spirit. It is for them a passing test; God thus tries their humility and patience, then restores again the spiritual joys of meditation. It is not the same with souls who are called to the prayer of faith. The call is recognized by three signs which S John of the Cross has carefully described:[2]

1. When the soul wishes to pray, the intellectual faculties at once become paralysed. These powers are of no use whatever to the heart in assisting it to love God. Painful efforts to stir them into action are useless and unsuccessful.

2. This atrophy is confined only to the time of prayer.

[1] 1 Cor. xiii 8-13.

[2] *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* Bk. II, chs. xiii-xiv. *Obscure Night,* Bk. I, chs. ix-x.

If it endured longer, it would be a sign of disease. On the contrary, outside the time devoted to prayer, liberty of thought and feeling is restored. The mind can apply itself with relish to the study of religious truth. The taste disappears only when the soul desires to pray.

3. In the midst of this torpor of intelligence and sense, the will remains active. It is profoundly attracted towards him, perfectly convinced that he is there, and may be adored and loved by gazing upon him in silence.

This last sign is most important. The other two are not by themselves sufficient to indicate the call of the soul to the prayer of faith. They are either a test for souls of good will who are destined to follow the way of meditation, or else they are a punishment inflicted on souls who have unfaithfully allowed themselves to be drawn to the love of creatures. God chastises them by withdrawing the feeling of his presence. It is a salutary warning which incites them to a reformation of life. But when, in addition to the two first signs, the third is added, this is manifestly a call to contemplation. The need of loving God, felt by the will, and not issuing from the operations of the mind or the emotions of the heart, is clearly produced by the Holy Spirit as a means of eliciting faith in his presence. This faith reaches directly to the will and incites it to pray. Doubt is no longer possible. The grace of prayer is given to the soul under a new form. Now we have already explained in Chapters III and IV that to pray with profit, we must co-operate with grace, and accept that grace which God offers. When these three signs are found together, the soul must resolutely devote itself to practising the prayer of faith.

The passage from one state of prayer to another is a very delicate matter, and it is extremely important not to be deceived about the signs which indicate the time of transition. S John of the Cross gives us this prudent counsel: "Just as it is necessary to leave the prayer of meditation at the right moment in order to enter on the way of union, so it is equally important not to attempt to change our state before the time

desired by the Spirit of God, lest we should have to retrace our steps." Père Joseph du Tremblay gives some further practical advice, with the help of which any misconception may be avoided: "We should follow the attraction of the Holy Spirit, which suspends the use of the mental and bodily powers, whether this be at the beginning, middle, or end of our meditation. Two conditions should be realized: (1) The allurement of love should so occupy and engage the mind as to prevent any false idleness of the faculties. (2) We should be able to return to the ordinary exercise of meditation as soon as the charm of contemplation ceases to allure us."[1]

Thus, everything is reduced to the one great commandment of charity. If you cannot love God without reflection, then reflect on that religious truth which succeeds best in reaching, expanding, and inflaming your heart with love. But if you can love without having recourse to reasoning, then leave all reflection alone, no matter how beautiful it may appear to you to be. This is the all-important rule for every prayer. Bossuet accepts the three indications given by S John of the Cross, but considers that the third is all-sufficing in its rigour. In a letter to Mme. de Maisonfort he says: "I am convinced that by devoting ourselves to faith alone, which is neither reflective nor argumentative, we may cease reasoning, without therefore finding it impossible ever to do so again. . . . This state is good and in entire conformity with the teaching of S Paul, who asks for faith alone, not for reasoning. When I find a Christian who, although retaining the faculty of reasoning, does not think about it, and can pray without its help, I have nothing to say of him except that he believes and lives in much peace."[2] Bossuet's advice is particularly applicable to people who have made much progress in acquiring the habit of the prayer of faith. These souls lost the power of meditation at the time of transition to the contemplative state. God made them change their manner of prayer.

[1] *Méthode d'oraison*, III, i.
[2] *Œuvres*, Vives-Lachet, xxvii 322.

Later on they recovered the taste for meditation, but under a new form. They no longer used it as a special and transitory religious exercise, but their meditation was, so to speak, continual. In the words of the psalmist, they meditate on the law of the Lord day and night.[1] If it ever comes about that they are able to practise, at will, either affective prayer or obscure contemplation, they must be left free to follow what most attracts them. In each case their prayer will be most excellent.

We will not give the advice of Bossuet to those souls who begin prematurely to leave the way of meditation. They run the risk of abandoning prayer altogether by placing themselves in the obscurity of faith, without being drawn to do so by the consciousness of the presence of God, and the allurements of his love. S John of the Cross made the following observations to these souls: "If the soul were without this knowledge or sense of God's presence at that time, the result would be that it would have nothing and do nothing; for having ceased from meditation, wherein the soul acts discursively, by means of its intellectual faculties—and contemplation not yet attained to, which is that general knowledge, wherein the spiritual powers of the soul, memory, intellect, and will, are exerted, and united in this knowledge, which is as it were effected and received in them—every act of the worship of God must of necessity be wanting; for the soul cannot act at all, nor receive impressions, nor persevere in the work it has before it, but by the action of its intellectual and spiritual faculties."[2]

When the above rules have been observed with all prudence, and the way of contemplation has been once entered upon, the soul should persevere in its practice of suffering, aridity of spirit, and dryness of heart. It is a very painful state, as we have seen from the example of S Jane Frances de Chantal, and few souls have the courage to continue in it for any length of time. Many abandon it when they cease to have any

[1] Ps. i 2.

[2] *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, ch. xiv. Works, i, p. 107.

sensible and conscious experience—that is to say, at the very time when it is beginning to be most profitable to the soul, by reason of the virtues of humility and patience which it causes them to put into practice. They are willing to remain at rest near God when they enjoy his presence, but they refuse to suffer weariness near him. Yet if we only have the courage to support this weariness, and persistently persevere in spite of it, we could not possibly act in a better way! S Jane Frances de Chantal gives expression to a beautiful thought on this subject. She says: "If we can only utter with truthful sincerity these words: *My God and my all*, we will never grow weary of prayer. For when we begin to grow weary, these two words expressed from the depth of the heart will dispel at once all fatigue."[1]

May we, in order to allay this dryness, address particular petitions to God? Certainly, if an interior attraction urges us to do so, for we would then be following the example of S Jane de Chantal just referred to. But if we do not feel this attraction, then it is best to refrain from doing so. The teaching of Bossuet will clear away all doubt on this point. "Many people," he says, "imagine that they do not make formal acts of hope, contrition, thanksgiving, petition, etc., unless they are certain of it by means of specified reflection, and interior sentiments corresponding to the usual formula of these acts. They think that the acts which they make in their heart must be expressed in so many explicit terms. But they are wrong in regarding the matter in this light. Each deliberate movement of the soul, whose object is either a simple regard, or a promised reward, or past sin, or graces received, or favours desired—every act of this sort is expressed quite independently of reflection and explicit utterance. They are all so many formal acts of hope, contrition, thanksgiving, and petition. They are even more simple, natural, and sincere from the very fact that they are not expressly reflected upon. God sees that they come from the depth of the heart, and inclines favour-

[1] *Œuvres*, iii.

ably towards them according to the prayer of the Church: "O God, to whom the secrets of all hearts are revealed, and to whom we speak by the desire of the will alone: *Deus cui omne cor patet et omnis voluntas loquitur.*"

Bossuet adds, in speaking of Père Balthasar Alvarez: "This holy religious said that God sees that the heart of his servant desires something, although he does not ask for it in so many words, and he therefore grants it of his own accord without waiting for a formal demand. He sees everything in the very desire itself, because with God the wish is sufficient, but with men that wish must be expressed in words. Therefore in this prayer petitions are made whenever the desire is raised in the heart. That is to say, the petition is made, not by *a corresponding formal act* or explicit utterance, but by *desires* which in this case are the *equivalent of acts;* for the desire to make some future petition is known by God as such, since he knows the wish of every heart."[1]

We have further counsel to give which will be found in the following chapters. But if the reader desires precise and detailed rules as to the conduct of the soul during meditation, they will be found in the works of S John of the Cross.

[1] De Caussade, I, Dial. 8.

CHAPTER XXII

PROGRESS IN THE PRAYER OF FAITH

If we wish to make progress in the prayer of faith, three conditions must be fulfilled which we will briefly describe. The first is that this holy exercise must be practised every day. The object is to arrive at divine union—the spiritual espousals, in the language of the mystics.[1]

S Teresa, in Chapters XXI and XXII of the *Way of Perfection*, counsels souls to make a firm resolution, and inviolable rule on this subject. "No matter what happens, or what business we have, no matter what difficulties we encounter, we must overcome everything, and never cease until we attain our end." It does not show very much fidelity if, anxious to finish, we cut short our daily meeting in order to devote the time to other affairs. On the contrary, we should remain as long as we possibly can, in order to make it more and more profitable. We have to effect divine union, transformation into God by love. But this is impossible without a detachment of will, which empties the heart of its former affections and gives to God the place they once occupied.

S John of the Cross, describing the state of the soul when at last worthy of the spiritual espousals, puts these words on her lips: "My soul is so detached, so denuded, so lonely, so estranged from all created things, in heaven and earth; it has penetrated so far within into interior recollection with thee . . . that

[1] The term "spiritual espousals" does not always express among the mystics the sublime state described by S Teresa and S John of the Cross by this name. This symbolic term can be applied to all union with God that has become habitual, even although it may be less lofty in nature. For an habitual union between God and the soul establishes relations which are of so intimate a character that they cannot be better symbolized than by the intimate and sacred union effected by the Sacrament of Matrimony.

there is nothing whatever that can cause me pleasure with its sweetness, or disgust with its vileness."[1] In order to be united with him, God does not ask us to give up the use of this world's goods, for these are necessary in our present life. Nor does he make it a crime to feel *in our nature* pleasure and sorrow by reason of the beings with whom we come in contact. We cannot prevent that. All that God requires is the disposal of our will. If it preserves its independence in the midst of bodily and mental cares; if, in the words of S Paul, it uses things as if it did not use them; if no impression of joy or sorrow, hope or fear, can draw it away to forget its own duties, then God is satisfied. For our will is then in perfect conformity with his, which is the essential condition for the spiritual espousals.

It is quite otherwise when the will is the slave of its natural impressions. At the very entrance to the way which leads to divine union, S John of the Cross puts the absolute necessity of mortifying without mercy the four passions of joy, sorrow, hope, and fear, which ceaselessly urge the soul to come into contact with the material good and evil of this world. If the will does not make courageous and persevering efforts to become detached from these passions and master them, it will stop on the way. The saint writes many remarkable chapters on this point. He shows the passions ravaging in a thousand ways the soul which has become their slave; they torture it and blind its judgment; they cover it with furrows, and sap up its vigour and life. Finally, they hold it in fetters far away from God. Thus, if the soul is to become master of itself, if it is to preserve peace of heart and tranquillity of mind in the midst of the vicissitudes of this life, it must practise courageously interior mortification of the passions. When they surge up within us, the will by a vigorous effort must lift itself up towards God; and it must continue this effort by persevering application to silent prayer, until calm once more returns to the faculties of mind and body.

[1] *Spirit. Cant.*, stanza xl. Works, ii, p. 211.

When mortification is spoken of, many good people think only of bodily austerities, and never get beyond that. They yield to joy and sorrow, hope and fear, without scruple or remorse. As these passions enter wellnigh into everything, the mind and heart of certain people often resemble a sea lashed into fury by the tempest. Day and night they are beset by countless thoughts and feelings, which do not allow the least peace to their souls. It is in this pitiable condition that they come into God's presence to make their prayer. It is extremely difficult to gain a complete victory over these passions, even with the best possible intentions. S John of the Cross, in the First Book of the *Obscure Night,* supplies an interesting proof of this fact. He makes an examination of conscience for holy souls, by going through the seven capital sins it is possible for them to commit, not in the natural but in the supernatural order. For example, he enumerates certain imperfections of spiritual avarice, gluttony, luxury, etc. Some of these descriptions are realistic and sad to a startling degree. Now, no amount of active mortification will deliver souls completely from these imperfections. How could they possibly succeed, when for the most part they are not even conscious of these faults, and sometimes even take them for virtues?

We are forced to conclude that the intervention of God is necessary, in order to make good our own powerlessness. In his mercy he does not refuse this assistance, but comes to our aid by bringing us into the night of the senses, by means of obscure contemplation. Such is the principal motive which makes the prayer of faith so useful for our spiritual progress. The reader knows that during this prayer God paralyzes the intellectual and sense faculties, in order to cause the will to act by itself alone. If the will accepts this suffering and grows accustomed to it, it increases in strength, becomes purified from its stains, and gradually acquires the dispositions necessary for divine union. When the Apostles threatened with shipwreck called upon Jesus, saying: "Lord, save us, or we perish," the Son of God commanded the wind and the

sea, which obeyed his words, and immediately there was a great calm.[1] If God were to act in the same manner in calling us to the prayer of faith, it would be possible by a prayer of very short length to make rapid strides in our spiritual progress. This actually does take place in miraculous states of prayer, of which we will speak later on. But obscure contemplation has nothing miraculous about it at all. It is an ordinary prayer like meditation or affective prayer. With this, as with other graces, we are entirely at liberty to co-operate with the divine action or not.

It is necessary to prolong the time given to contemplation if we would make it profitable. A short prayer could never succeed in transforming our lives and uniting us with God, especially if we have not been sufficiently courageous in the practice of interior mortification. Many of the saints are very emphatic on this point, as, for instance, S Peter of Alcantara: "If the time is too short," he says, "we pass it in cleansing the imagination and training the heart, and then when all is ready, and the time for beginning the exercise has arrived, we leave off praying."[2] S John of the Cross also says: "An imperfect soul spends all its energies in the preparation of itself, and even then the fire does not always penetrate the fuel it has to burn."[3] They prevent falling backwards, but at the same time do not advance the soul in perfection. They draw the soul near to the fountain of life, filled with the love of creatures. People scarcely have time to remove obstacles from the memory, and then they stop and draw back. How can this method ever fill the soul with the Spirit of God? Like Pilate, who said to our Lord, "What is truth?" and then withdrew without waiting for his reply, these souls call upon God, but do not wait long enough for God to bestow himself upon them.

If we prolong our prayer, we will not be slow in receiving our reward. "At first," says S Teresa, "the grace is hardly ever bestowed except after a long mental

[1] Mark iv 38, 39.
[2] *De l'oraison*, ch. 22.
[3] *Living Flame*, Stanza I, l. vi. Works, ii. p. 232.

prayer."[1] She speaks of complete and supernatural quiet which is almost miraculous in nature. Short prayers in the case of those who have not yet arrived at divine union will never merit so great a favour. We see now how deceived are those people who devote several hours daily to various exercises of piety, among which prayer occupies a very small place.

There remains a last condition which is indispensable for assuring our progress in perfection. It is the necessity of having a very great fervour when we practise the prayer of faith. The writers who make obscure contemplation an extraordinary and passive state, expose souls to the danger of forgetting this condition. For in passive prayers, like ecstasy and rapture, God does everything, and the soul nothing. It is satisfied with lovingly consenting to the operations of grace. But if we were to act in this way during the prayer of faith we would be wasting time; we would receive no benefit whatever, and it would soon turn into Quietism. We cannot be too thoroughly convinced that obscure contemplation is an ordinary prayer, and that while it lasts we must be actually at work, as in meditation and affective prayer. The difference between these three ordinary prayers arises from the number of faculties employed in the work of prayer. During meditation the mind has the largest share of labour, and the heart and will are, by its means, gradually drawn to prayer. In affective prayer the senses occupy the first place. In contemplation the will alone devotes itself to love. But in each of these prayers there must be work on our part, and the success attained will be in proportion to the vigour of our own labour.

Certainly it is not necessary in the prayer of faith to express our desires in explicit petitions. Bossuet gives us the example of S Jane Frances de Chantal to prove that the opposite is the case. All that is wanted is that we should have desires, and make them so sincere, heartfelt, and strong as to compel God, by their very force, to give ear to them. Take S Dominic for a model. He had no bed in his cell, but passed the whole

[1] *Vie*, xviii.

night in the monastic church, going from altar to altar, and repeating his prayer. The desires of his heart found expression in groans, sighs, and piercing cries, which could be heard by the religious in the adjoining monastery. How strong must the ardour of his soul have been which could deprive him of sleep, and be manifested in such burning supplication! Too often are we wanting in holy desires of this kind, but S Teresa tells us not to moderate them in the slightest degree. We are willing to be content with a very small degree of perfection. We do not aim high enough, says Père Surin, and for that reason make such small progress in prayer and in perfection. Walk in the footsteps of the saints. Pray with fervour. Remain faithful to the practice every day of your lives, devoting to it all the time that you can, and your prayer will be sure to be heard.

CHAPTER XXIII

PRAYER OF FAITH AND SIN

PROGRESS in the prayer of faith means progress in the practice of virtue. It gradually leads the soul to perfection and union with God, as we will show in the following chapter. At the same time, contemplation, even when it is habitual, does not make us proof against sin. Undoubtedly it is impossible for a soul, given to a life of prayer, to live in an habitual state of mortal sin. But unfortunately the soul is not sheltered from isolated faults, and even grave offences. Negligence, surprise, exposure in a rash moment and under specious pretexts to some dangerous occasion of sin, is often sufficient to cause the most lamentable falls.

But here is a consoling truth which should attach us more firmly to the practice of prayer, and make us resolve never to abandon it. Although it cannot prevent many a fall, it can and does help us quickly to rise again, and thus stops the evil consequences which result from our sin. Sin in itself, of course, is very harmful; but it is still more pernicious in its consequences, when it gives rise to sorrow, discouragement, and even despair. Many dangerous evils may in this way result from one mortal sin. Many souls devoted to prayer are kept free from this terrible evil. They have formed the habit of corresponding faithfully with the grace of prayer. God does not take away this grace from souls who have fallen into sin. If after a fall the soul enters into itself and feels inclined to pray; if, as a result of the habit formed, it shows itself obedient to the divine inspiration, a sincere act of contrition will soon lift it up again. A speedy confession will follow, and often from the evil much good will result.

For pride is the chief cause of sin. We count too much upon ourselves, and too little upon God, and this

presumption is our ruin. There is only one way of crushing out and destroying pride, and that is by accepting humiliations without resentment and grumbling, and confessing sincerely that they are well deserved. Sin is the most powerful humiliation of all for destroying self-love; in everything else there is room for pride. We persuade ourselves that we suffer unjustly, and practise heroic virtue by bearing the humiliations which came upon us without complaining. But what room for self-glorification is there in sin which lays bare our own interior depravity? Sin thus produces humility. It is, as it were, the manure which is laid at the roots of this virtue, and becomes the most fertile soil for its growth. If the doctrine contained in this little book is well understood, especially in Chapter IV, on the means of acquiring grace, we will rise at once from our sins as soon as we have fallen; we will gladly renew the resolutions we have broken; we will return to the work with renewed vigour; we will set about repairing the evil and regaining lost time. The truth of S Paul's words will be experienced: "All things work together unto good, to such as . . . are called to be saints."[1] "All things," S Augustine adds, "even sin."

S Francis de Sales speaks in the same sense, and is not afraid to make an extremely consoling statement. According to him, a fall even into mortal sin does not impede the progress of a soul in the way of perfection, *provided only that it does not remain in that state for any length of time.* It is an astonishing thing to read these words of the saint referring to progress and perfection, yet nothing is more true. The soul which quickly recovers from sin, finds itself again at that very point of the road where it had fallen. Sin caused the loss of everything, but God restores again all its merit and virtue to the soul. If then the soul wishes to profit by its fall, it can renew its forward march, travel at a quicker pace, and thus hasten its own progress. The change in S Peter after his threefold denial is a startling proof of this comforting truth.

We turn now to a more intricate question—the

[1] Rom. viii 28.

thousand and one small faults, resulting from the infirmity of human nature, without any malice on the part of the will. Far from being attached to these things, we sincerely deplore them and would give anything to be freed from the danger. Over and over again we have made resolutions, and as often broken them. Many persons, who have not received much instruction on prayer and the interior life, are profoundly troubled and discouraged about faults of this kind. They exaggerate their importance and make the mistake of trying to meet these frailties as if they were real sins. But an entirely different method should be followed. If we are confronted with well-defined sins which can be realized and dealt with, then of course it is the right thing to make definite and precise resolutions. Anything definite can be detected and remedied with the help of practical, well-chosen means. But the situation is not the same in dealing with the small faults of which we are speaking. S Thomas compares these venial faults to little drops of rain. You turn to the left to avoid the rain-drops which fall on the right, but while doing so you are touched by those which fall on the left. How can any reflection help us to correct faults which are committed without reflection on our part? What can the will do to alter natural actions which take place without its co-operation? Another comparison will make our meaning more clear, and will also explain how useless it is to pass the time during contemplation making resolutions against faults of this kind. When a drop of vinegar is examined under a strong microscope, it is astonishing to find that a number of small germs are moving about in it. Many souls examine themselves in this way with the help of strong magnifying-glasses. If they advance in prayer, it is very easy for them to see the extreme corruption of their nature to the smallest detail. The light of contemplation is the best of microscopes. I would say to these persons: You have seen the microbes of your nature: very well, and what then? Have instruments ever been discovered sufficiently fine to take hold of and destroy the microbes in the drop of vinegar? In the

same way you will never be able to probe into your conscience, and pluck out the imperceptible roots whence your small faults are perpetually arising. Throughout your whole life, you will have to undergo the torture of seeing these faults come out again and again, without having any direct means of preventing their return.

But though you lack any direct means, you have at hand an indirect means which is ever so much more powerful. You will be transformed when God has healed, purified, and renewed your nature by gradually delivering it from the effects of original corruption. During your contemplation you must fervently ask him to work this effect. The more you feel humbled at the sight of your faults, the more you must turn from them in disgust, in order to fix your entreating gaze upon God. Confess in his sight your misery, and your powerlessness to free yourself. Have a firm belief in his omnipotence and infinite mercy, and say to him: "Lord, permit me not to dishonour thee. If my faults do harm to thy glory, deign to deliver me from them. Grant at least that they may serve to make me more humble. I detest them from the bottom of my heart, but as I cannot correct them by any power of my own, I wish to bear the shame of them in peace, while awaiting the time of my deliverance, just as I would bear an incurable bodily malady." A great deal could be said about this matter, but we refer those who are anxious to investigate it thoroughly to a work of Père de Caussade: *Spiritual Instruction on Prayer after the Teaching of Bossuet.* In the first dialogue on "Purity of Conscience," in the second part of this book, many good and practical counsels are to be found, which are based on excellent considerations. Here, for example, is the last question and its answer: "How do you account for the fact that many souls highly favoured by God, at the same time have many faults, which, however, do not seem to do any harm to their perfection?" "The reason is that, unlike imperfect souls, they do not desire, encourage, or tolerate these tendencies, but, on the contrary, hate, detest, and fight against them. It is

not the knowledge of the heart's affections and attachments which is most displeasing to God. By the permission of God, this is nothing more than weakness and pure frailty of nature, which is found in the holiest souls, who have acquired the virtue of interior and even exterior humility. Moreover, these almost involuntary faults are admirably balanced by heroic virtue, and always accompanied by the deepest humility at the sight of these same failings, which they are always endeavouring to correct without success." Admire the ways in which God leads souls to perfection. This alone should make us more careful in our judgement of certain people, whose inmost soul is altogether hidden from us. Their real state is often concealed under most deceptive appearances, and even one instance, which we have seen or known, should be sufficient to make us desist from rashly judging others.

CHAPTER XXIV

PRAYER OF FAITH AND DIVINE UNION

Is it possible to arrive at divine union by means of the prayer of faith, without experiencing rapture or ecstasy, or any other miraculous state of prayer so frequent in the lives of some of the saints? We will show in this chapter that there can be no doubt of its possibility. And first to explain what is meant by divine union. It is an interior state in which the soul is completely under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The activity of mental and bodily powers remains, and works spontaneously in a multitude of small movements done without reflection. But the habit of asking God's help, and waiting obediently for the divine impulse, has become so strongly impressed upon the soul, that in the end all her actions are done in permanent co-operation with God. Thus S Paul could say: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me." Such a condition is the highest perfection that can be attained in this world. It is rarely found complete in its exterior state. As we saw in the preceding chapter, God frequently allows real failings in holy souls, which serve to make them humble. But their interior perfection is complete. "It consists," says S Thomas, "in the human heart being entirely attached and united with God."[1] It is love, not transitory but permanent, which has effected this union. A love of God, even were it as ardent as that of the ecstatics, if it did not continue after the ecstasy had passed away, would never produce divine union. A state of ecstasy is not of long duration. It is therefore necessary to make the divine union a permanent one, by another kind of prayer which does not pass away. Now only obscure contemplation can become habitual and continue in a latent state even when the soul has ceased to devote itself entirely to the exercise.

[1] *Summa Theol.*, 2-2, 186, 1.

Continual meditation is not possible. The mind turns from its work, and is then obliged to think of all kinds of other things which keep it away from the thought of God. In the same way affective prayer cannot be practised continually. The feelings grow tired much more quickly than the brain. There remains then the will, enlightened by the highest point of the mind—that is to say, the spiritual faculty which we employ in making the prayer of faith. If by perseverance in the practice of this prayer, by courageously withdrawing our will from every natural affection to creatures, and by the fervent abandoning of it to God in order that it may be inflamed with his love, we succeed in being heard—then what we have longed for has come about, and we have obtained divine union. For the soul once enflamed with love never ceases to love. This love accompanies the soul through every occupation of life, and as God returns love for love, it follows that the Holy Spirit never leaves the soul and directs its every movement.

God once said to the patriarch Abraham: "Walk before me, and be perfect."[1] We may conclude from these words that perfection is the fruit of God's continual presence with us. But there is only one way of living constantly in this presence, and that is the way of love. Although it is impossible to think of God always, it is by no means impossible to love him so fervently that the heart is never detached from him. Thus the exercise of the presence of God draws us on to love by the will alone, and this in turn leads the way to obscure contemplation.[2]

It will not be a matter of surprise to find that the saints include in perfection a state of divine union, whether it be by the exercise of the presence of God, or by continual prayer. S Francis de Sales gives a beautiful description of the effects of this divine presence: "It happens then sometimes that our Lord imperceptibly infuses into the depths of our hearts a certain

[1] Gen. xvii 1.

[2] Bossuet's words on the continual prayer of contemplatives may be re-read here. They are found in Chapter XIII.

agreeable sweetness, which testifies his presence, and then the powers, yea, the very exterior senses of the soul, by a certain secret contentment, turn in towards that most interior part where is the most amiable and dearest Spouse. For as a new swarm of bees, when it would take flight and change country, is recalled by a sound softly made on metal basins, by the smell of honied wine, or by the scent of some odoriferous herbs, being stayed by the attraction of these agreeable things, and entering into the hive prepared for it; so our Saviour—pronouncing some secret word of his love, or pouring out the odour of the wine of his dilection, more delicious than honey, or letting stream the perfumes of his garments, that is, feelings of his heavenly consolations in our hearts, and thereby making them perceive his most welcome presence—draws unto him all the faculties of our soul, which gather about him, and stay themselves in him as in their most desired object. And as he who should cast a piece of loadstone amongst a number of needles would instantly see them turn all their points towards their well-beloved adamant, and join themselves to it, so when our Saviour makes his most delicious presence to be felt in the midst of our hearts, all our faculties turn their points in that direction, to be united to this incomparable sweetness."[1] S Augustine summarizes this teaching of S Francis in a very few words. "God," he says, "communicates to the soul a heavenly sweetness which surpasses all the delights of this world, and gives us strength to overcome them: *Dando menti coelestem delectationem qua omnis terrena delectatio superetur.*"

The mystics attribute these effects to "spiritual contacts." They receive them in obscure contemplation, without being in a state of ecstasy, whenever it pleases God to bestow them. Their effect upon the soul is very wonderful. Several persons have had the experience, and many, when they have once felt this contact of love with God, make more progress in one month than would have been brought about in ten or twenty

[1] *Treatise on the Love of God,* Bk. VI, c. vii. (English Trans. Burns Oates and Washbourne.)

years. Thus, contemplation inflames us with love, and love holds us united with God in a continual state of prayer. The saints alone can tell to what a pitch of perfection the soul can be raised by means of this union. We have heard Cassian affirm that the virtues of the saints are of very little value compared with contemplation, and he did not say this in scorn but in order to put them in their proper place. He shows, moreover, the necessary connection that must exist between contemplation and the practice of virtue. "There is," he says, "a proportionate bond between virtue and perfect prayer. For as the whole edifice of a virtuous life is built up in order to reach to the perfection of prayer, in the same way unless prayer preserves the edifice and permeates all its parts, binding and joining them together, the building can never remain firm and solid nor continue for any length of time without falling to the ground. A lasting and vigorous prayer can never be acquired without virtue, and virtue which is the foundation of prayer can never be brought to perfection without it." He then enumerates the virtues to be practised, and continues: "Before we begin our prayer, we should be in that state which we desire to be in during prayer. Our state then is but a continuation of the one which preceded it."[1] S Bonaventure has a magnificent passage on the union that exists between prayer and virtue, which is given at length by S Peter of Alcantara, and reproduced by many writers: "If you wish," he says, "to suffer patiently the adversities and miseries of this life, be a man of prayer. If you wish to obtain courage and strength against the temptations of the enemy, be a man of prayer. If you wish to mortify your own will with all its inclinations, be a man of prayer. If you wish to know the wiles of Satan and baffle his projects, be a man of prayer. If you wish to live a joyful life, and walk with delight along the ways of penance, be a man of prayer. If you wish to wipe from your soul the ever-recurring stains caused by useless thoughts and desires, be a man of prayer. If you wish

[1] Conference IX, chs. i and ii. Saudreau, *La vie d'union*, p. 105.

to nourish your soul with the marrow of devotion, and be always filled with good thoughts and aspirations, be a man of prayer. In prayer we receive the all-enlightening grace of the Holy Spirit, and become united to him. I say further: If you wish to reach the heights of contemplation and enjoy the sweet embrace of the Spouse, cultivate the practice of prayer. . . . We have heard and seen, and we continue to see every day, a large number of simple folk who have obtained all the favours just enumerated, and many more besides by means of prayer."

The contemplation of which S Bonaventure is speaking towards the end of this passage, is of a supernatural and miraculous order, if by the "sweet embraces of the Spouse," given as a reward for fidelity to ordinary prayer, he means rapture and ecstasy. The writings of the saints sometimes have this meaning when they refer to the heights of contemplation. But this fact does not lessen in any way the force of the proofs we have given to establish the existence of an ordinary contemplation. S John of the Cross also says: "The loving soul is meek, gentle, humble, and patient; the soul that is hardened in self-love hardens itself still more. If thou, O good Jesus, in thy love dost not make the soul gentle, it will persist in its natural hardness."[1] "The soul defends itself against its fleshly enemy by charity; for where there is a real love of God neither the love of self nor the love of creatures can enter in."[2] All this is a commentary on the famous text of S Paul "Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up; is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."[3] Here is the virtue which will never perish. Let us open our heart to it by seeking it in prayer, and it will open the gates of heaven for us.

[1] Maxim 91. Works, ii, p. 365. [2] Maxim 90. *Ibid.*
[3] 1 Cor. xiii 4-7.

CHAPTER XXV

MIRACULOUS STATES OF PRAYER

We enter now into the holy place, the sanctuary where the heavenly Bridegroom enters into familiar intercourse with the privileged souls who have become espoused to him here below. Let us enter it with the profoundest respect, free from all scientific curiosity. Let us imitate the saints who have spoken of these things solely for the spiritual advantage of souls. It is good to know a little about this matter, even although we may never be called to receive these favours ourselves. The knowledge will be useful by filling us with still greater admiration for the infinite condescension of the Creator towards his creatures, and by making us more conscious of our own humility.

When speaking about grace in Chapter III, we referred to the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit called gratuitous graces, *gratiae gratis datae*. Not only are we unable to merit these gifts, but they are of very little help towards our own sanctification. God grants them for our neighbour's profit. Miraculous states of prayer share somewhat in this characteristic. When they do serve to promote our own sanctification, this is not due to their miraculous character, but is quite independent of it. Our Lord having chosen S Teresa to reform the Carmelite Order, drew public attention to this fact by producing in her raptures and ecstasies. Later on towards the close of her life, when the spiritual espousals were completed, and she was receiving the most sublime interior gifts, the ecstasies gradually ceased to occur. As the saint was surprised at this change taking place and asked the reason of it, our Lord said to her: "At first thou hadst no influence. I gave it to thee by means of ecstasy. But now thy influence is well established, this means has become useless." This is a very valuable indication, and should

be well considered by souls desirous of attaining perfection, who think that for that purpose they must aspire to raptures, and even ask this favour of God.

A second reason, drawn from the teaching of S John of the Cross, warns us to have a still greater reluctance for favours of this kind. Miraculous states of prayer may remain mystical in nature; the soul then continues obscure contemplation in a supernatural way. At other times a miraculous prayer carries the soul from the darkness of mysticism, and transports it into the brightness of light shed from heaven upon certain particular truths. This is the case with visions and revelations. If the prayer remains mystic, it does not in itself present any danger, but retains all the priceless advantages of obscure contemplation. It even possesses them in a higher degree, since from being active it now becomes passive. The activity of the Holy Spirit completely takes the place of the activity of the soul, and it receives, in a secret and hidden manner, a very perfect knowledge of God, while all the time the heart is enflamed with love. The only danger from this kind of prayer arises if the rapture takes place in public. The onlookers would be profoundly impressed at the sight. Some would be filled with admiration, others would perhaps feel a certain amount of jealousy and would pretend to be incredulous, to criticize harshly, and give way to harmful suspicions. There is danger of vanity and self-love in the first case, and of undergoing much cruel suffering in the second; it is far better not to expose oneself to this experience. Everything should be done to resist rapture, especially when it is not produced in absolute secrecy.

When the miraculous prayer ceases to be of a mystical nature, it becomes extremely dangerous. We have given a whole chapter on the dangers to the mind arising from meditation, when the light of faith is shed upon the mind in a purely natural way. Who, then, can estimate the dangers to which the soul is exposed, when suddenly faced with supernatural light, shed upon it from heaven in a miraculous way? If curiosity is not subdued by submitting the soul to a rigorous morti-

fication, it will be certain to lose its balance. Visions and revelations may then become for it a cause of destruction. S John of the Cross, in estimating the gravity of this peril, and knowing the illusions which beset some souls in this matter, treats it at great length and detail. He takes as a first principle that visions and revelations must never be desired. The fact of having once experienced them, without having received them again, does not justfy us in desiring and asking for them afresh. If such liberty were indulged in, we should be committing at least venial sin. The same thing applies to confessors. By counselling souls to desire and ask for them, or by merely approving and tolerating them without any endeavour to stamp them out, a confessor may be just as much to blame as the souls themselves. He goes further and teaches that we must resist favours of this kind with all our strength. If forced to submit we must take no account of what we have seen and heard. After relating to a prudent director all that has been experienced, we must force ourselves to forget everything. Even though we are certain of the divine character of these visions and revelations, we should not be afraid that God will be offended because we have resisted and forgotten them. By acting in this way we please him by generously practising the virtues of prudence and humility. Mere prudence compels us to act in this way, for every divine revelation may be accompanied by those of the devil, and it is almost inevitably so with souls who curiously long for extraordinary things. God allowing the devil to deceive them, he uses and abuses his privilege. They begin with true communications and end by only receiving those that are false. Moreover, since our imagination has the power of reproducing in the mind things already seen and heard, souls attached to visions and revelations are exposed to self-deception, due merely to the workings of memory. When they have had a really supernatural vision, it stirs up all sorts of forms in the phantasy, and they fancy they are seeing further visions, which as a matter of fact all arise from the first.

The saint establishes his teaching with innumerable proof. Scriptural texts, facts, and arguments are drawn together, which cannot fail to dispel all doubt if only the trouble is taken to peruse them. He exposes the manifold dangers which result from the errors besetting these miraculous states, and makes it quite certain that, instead of furthering divine union, they draw the soul further and further away from God. And this he repeatedly asserts, that the union of the soul with God is not effected in the midst of light, but in the blackest darkness. Faith alone has the power of procuring it. In this matter, humility is necessary. Is it not the very summit of pride for a poor frail creature to dare to ask indiscreet questions of its Creator, by requesting and expecting revelations. We would not dare to be so familiar with the great ones of this world, and yet we allow ourselves to be so with God! On the contrary, we have everything to gain by showing our humility. The saint tells us that miraculous gifts of this kind produce their sanctifying effect by themselves, instantaneously, before consent has been given by the will. They are like burning brands applied to the naked flesh, which is seared by the slightest touch. The soul favoured with these gifts feels itself enflamed at once with love.

We advise a soul longing for ecstasy to follow the counsel of S Francis de Sales. In his excellent book *The Love of God*, he divides ecstasy into three classes. The first and second, which are of a miraculous nature, lift up the soul in rapture out of the body and deprive it of the use of its natural powers. But the third, which is entirely spiritual, leaves the use of the faculties untouched. It only disentangles the soul from the fetters of self-love, and throws it entirely upon the love of God and its neighbour. These spiritual ecstasies present no danger at all, and are extremely profitable to the soul, and we may desire and seek them. They will lead us to divine union and perfection, and are reached by being faithful to the prayer of obscure contemplation.

CHAPTER XXVI

PRAYER OF FAITH AND DEVOTION TO THE SAINTS

The prayer of faith, or obscure contemplation, is in no way prejudicial to devotion towards the Blessed Virgin and the saints, but, on the contrary, is most useful for strengthening and developing it. According to Bossuet, "the mystics teach that every object of faith may be the object of contemplation." Consequently we may practise the prayer of faith by contemplating our Lady and the saints, and thus love and honour them according to the will of God. For example, the archangel Gabriel in the salutation to Mary called her "full of grace"—that is to say, filled with the Divinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. What a wonderful plenitude! In thinking of it our mind is at a loss, and is filled with admiration and reverence. Should we not also experience the greatest confidence and thanksgiving, since all the spiritual gifts, virtues, and merits that we have ever received flow from this same plenitude of grace? Similarly S Francis of Assisi was absorbed in Jesus Christ, who adorned him with the marks of the holy stigmata. Here also the prayer of faith, with S Francis as the object of contemplation, can throw our whole soul entirely upon the crucified God. It is of very little importance where the obscure contemplation commences, even if it is with some particular aspect of religious truth. If the mind dwells upon this truth and reasons about it, it is meditation. Even with the Blessed Trinity as the subject of prayer, we may cease contemplating and loving, and make reflections like everyone who meditates. But let us be filled with admiration; let our mind cease reasoning and be held in wonderment; let the heart alone do its work of adoration and love; and then, even if this state were brought about by regarding the Blessed Virgin or one

of the saints, meditation ends and the contemplative state begins.

It can thus be seen how the prayer of faith, when it has for its object God considered in an angel or a saint, strengthens our devotion towards those privileged creatures who have become his friends. In speaking of charity in Chapter XX, we saw that it consisted in loving God in our neighbour. If God already dwells in a soul, we rejoice and admire the works of grace. If he does not dwell there yet, we exert every effort to bring it about. Such is the love of charity. But our best neighbour is the soul already sharing the company of our Lord in heaven. There, if we have the happiness of reaching it, we also will love him for all eternity. Now since contemplation is the most efficacious means of acquiring charity, it must be an immense help to us on earth in strengthening our love for the Blessed Virgin and the saints, when we see them so filled with God.

Moreover, contemplative souls do not make the prayer of faith continually. They have other duties to perform, and when they cease their prayer in order to occupy themselves with something else, it is possible for them to make particular acts. During contemplation their intellectual powers were paralyzed; they were incapable of making reflections. But outside the time of contemplation, they read and meditate like any other person. During the exercise they experienced no sense emotion and framed no vocal prayer; but their contemplation finished, they recite vocal prayers with great feeling and piety. In short, they form all kinds of particular desires like the rest of the faithful. It is then possible for them to satisfy their devotion towards the Blessed Virgin and the saints, and this they generally do with the greatest wisdom. They observe that discretion which is required owing to the difference there is between a commandment and a counsel. The commandments impose a limit to our liberty which we must not pass; counsels leave us free. We must not, of course, despise them, but as they comprise a multitude of good works, and as it is impossible for the same

person to do all these works at the same time—for example, the work of hospitals, schools, foreign missions, sanctification of Christians at home, etc.—it becomes necessary to choose one or other of these works. We are therefore free to give the preference to those which suit us best.

Apply these principles to the question of devotion to the saints. This devotion is obligatory upon us on certain days of the year, as, for example, holidays of obligation. We may be certain that contemplative souls keep all these feasts with piety, and thus obey the commandment of the Church. But with counsels it is different. Since it is impossible to follow them all, we have to make a choice. Who will make this choice? Who will decide whether a soul should devote more time to devotions in honour of the Blessed Virgin, or of some saint? Who will make the preference for S Benedict, S Francis of Assisi, S Dominic, S Ignatius, etc.? It is impossible to join every religious Order at the same time, and be under a number of different superiors. What is the right place for a particular soul, and how is it to be discovered? God, who has created us, and bestowed upon each one different powers, inclinations, and abilities, is alone able to reveal quite clearly the position we are to fill in his Church. And this he willingly does with those souls who faithfully have recourse to him in prayer. Others who follow their imagination, natural impressions, and often the illusions of the devil, may be easily deceived. But a soul devoted to prayer is never deceived. It asks for light from above; it submits every interior inspiration to the judgement of authority, and rules its conduct according to the decision given. Hence these souls are in peace whatever their particular devotions may be. For it is not a question of comparing the respective value of these devotions, and selecting those which have greater intrinsic worth. If this were so there would be a danger of everyone choosing the same devotion and the same religious Order, to the detriment of others which have also their proper place in the Church. Individual tastes must be subordinated to

the common good, and to preserve this there must be a place for everyone, and each one must occupy that place.

This may be seen from a comparison. In a royal palace the King and Queen each have their respective apartments, and to each suite belongs a number of officers, chamberlains, ladies and gentlemen-in-waiting, etc. The same person cannot be the chamberlain of the King as well as of the Queen. Each one gives his service according to the place assigned to him. The Queen's chamberlain is occupied in her service and does not trouble much about the King. In the same way, the King's chamberlain stays near the King and is not concerned much with the Queen. As long as they are zealously fulfilling the duties incumbent on their office, they do not trouble very much about anything else connected with the Court. Similarly with the attractions of the Holy Spirit. He makes us, as it were, the chamberlains of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin, or of some other great saint. God has selected this saint to revive once more in his Church the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, that one to introduce devotion to the Sacred Heart. He has made use of very many to increase devotion towards the Blessed Virgin, by multiplying the number of feasts in her honour. Each one accomplished his mission and rendered an account of it to God, without being judged as to the mission of others. Such is the part that we also have to play. We must keep in the position in which God has placed us, follow our own individual inclinations, and hold our souls in peace.

Devotion to our Lady was very prominent in the locality where S Gertrude was living, and she was extremely troubled and alarmed when she carefully examined herself and failed to find in her own case the same ardent feelings of devotion. Her heart was so inflamed with love for Jesus Christ that she could not give a thought to anything else. She confided in our Lord and asked him to clear up her trouble. Jesus answered: "The greatest pleasure thou canst possibly give my Mother is to love me without measure. If

you cannot think of her because you think so much of me, far from offending her, you give her the greatest happiness."[1]

Timid, sensitive folk, who want to practise every kind of devotion at the same time, should take comfort in this. They should submit their interior inspirations to the judgement of a good director, and be obedient to him without seeking for anything else. A little well performed is ever so much better than a multitude of works and prayers badly carried out.

[1] *Insinuations de la divine piété*, Bk. III, ch. xx.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT IS THE BEST KIND OF PRAYER?

In order to make a suitable reply to this question, we must first indicate some important distinctions. Consider, firstly, the prayers in themselves apart from the person making them. Treated thus, from an objective point of view, prayers may be arranged in several categories. There are public and private prayers, vocal and mental, ordinary and extraordinary or miraculous. These have each an intrinsic value of their own, and compared one with another their value is not equal. But whatever may be the objective value of a prayer, in practice we must always consider it in relation to the person who is praying. Then only can we estimate its true value, which is increased or diminished according to the good or bad dispositions of that person. We will, first of all, examine the value of a prayer considered in itself. In the front rank we must place public prayer—that is to say, the Mass, Divine Office, and other religious solemnities. These prayers are triumphs of harmony made in God's honour. Now harmonious effects are far more pleasing than solos, yet at the same time they are interrupted by solos which add greatly to their beauty. Moreover, the concerts of harmony, arranged by the Church under God's inspiration, find an echo in the angelic choirs. This is especially true of the Mass. The Son of God has there the principal part. He renews in a mysterious and peaceful way the bloody sacrifice offered upon the Cross for the redemption of the human race. This same sacrifice he offers perpetually in heaven, his sacred wounds being always in the sight of God the Father. Each holy Mass is a part of this great harmony, which bursts forth at once from the Church triumphant and the Church militant, to the glory of the Most High, and for

the advantage either of the souls in Purgatory or the faithful upon earth. Is it possible to conceive a more beautiful, a more sublime, a more efficacious prayer?

All those who take part, if they do their work properly, add to the beauty of the harmony. Each one has a share of the merit by taking part in public worship, and the merit obtained is generally superior to that of private prayer. Nothing, therefore, can possibly be of greater value than the celebration of Mass, or assisting devoutly at this august sacrifice.

The same may be said in due proportion of the Divine Office. It is made up of the most beautiful prayers the Holy Spirit has ever placed on the lips of man—the psalms of David. These form the principal part of the office, and the Church adds prayers suited to the circumstances of each day. Then, in order to stir up fervour, the psalms are interwoven with subjects for meditation, chosen either from the books of the Old and New Testament, or from the life of the saint, or from the mystery which is being kept as a feast that day, or from a commentary on the Holy Gospel taken from the writings of a doctor of the Church. Taken together, all this makes a harmonious setting of holy thoughts and ardent prayers. And here again, it is not a private prayer but a choir of praise, made up each day by the sacerdotal body all over the world. Nothing better than this could possibly be found.

Descending to a lower plane we have the private vocal prayers, such as the Litany of the Saints and of the Blessed Virgin, the Rosary, and other devotions well known to the faithful. Their saintly origin, the beautiful thoughts they express, and, above all, the approbation of the Church, give a value to these prayers which cannot lightly be passed over.

At the same time, from one aspect all vocal prayer is inferior to mental prayer, because it is possible to pray with the lips only and from routine, without the mind or the heart taking any part at all. S Augustine speaks of people who say or sing office, without adding any interior religious sentiment to their exterior homage, and compares their utterance to the growling of dogs.

In this respect, mental prayer is far superior to vocal, since it necessarily comes from our inmost soul, and offers to God spiritual acts which are always agreeable to him. What is the respective value of the different mental prayers considered in themselves *quite apart from the fervour of the people who make them?* We may know to a certain extent by recalling the teaching contained throughout this work. The merit of these prayers entirely depends on the degree of love for God which they stir up in our soul. Now in meditation it often happens that the whole time is spent in reflection, and scarcely any at all is devoted to love. Moreover, the soul remains far from God. He is loved at a distance, through the medium of images and mental reasoning, which is least favourable to the ardour of a holy love. In affective prayer the time is entirely given over to love; but it is a love of the senses, and has all the weakness and drawbacks arising from sensibility. In the prayer of faith, on the contrary, love is spiritualized. It is expressed by the will alone in courageous acts of adoration, humility, patience, obedience, and childlike abandonment. Thus, objectively considered, meditation is inferior to affective prayer, and this in turn to contemplation.

If we continue our examination of the objective value of mental prayers, we must now speak of those which are supernatural and miraculous. These are of greater value than all the rest. We should even place them outside the discussion entirely, since they do not depend on any effort of ours. In every prayer, in fact, there is the part played by the Holy Spirit, and the part which depends on us. The work of the Holy Spirit is clearly the most important and the most to be prized. Our part increases or diminishes in merit, according to the degree of willing obedience that we give to the impulse of grace. Now in ordinary prayer we are quite at liberty to resist the Holy Spirit, and too often we abuse our privilege. But this is not so in the case of extraordinary prayers, and their miraculous character rests entirely on this fact. The action of God is more powerful than ours and commands the consent of our will,

making all resistance impossible. The merit of these prayers remains untouched, without being impaired by any perverse act on our part. At what point does the prayer begin to be miraculous? To a certain extent we may say that the threshold of the miraculous state is in the complete tranquillity, which remains as such without proceeding as far as rapture. In ordinary contemplation God acts only upon the will. He attracts it to himself, leaving the inferior faculties in their natural state, entirely unaffected. Mortified souls generally keep these faculties at rest. Their contemplation then easily procures for them complete tranquillity, without the help of an extraordinary grace. It may happen that the devil chooses the time of prayer to disturb and trouble these souls with tiresome recollections, painful suggestions, and evil thoughts. Unmortified souls come to their prayer, with mind wandering and heart filled with aridity, as a result of their venial faults. In both these cases an almost miraculous grace is necessary to ensure complete quietude. God assists the soul by an act of infinite mercy. He deigns to extend his influence to the intellectual and sense faculties by driving out the devil, and procuring for the soul a profound peace. He does not cause the mind to make reflections, nor does he stir up vivid emotions in the senses. He merely holds them in quiet, and prevents them from putting any obstacle to the work of love being done by the will. Contemplation then becomes most sweet and delightful.

S Francis de Sales, in chapter xi of Book VI of the *Love of God*, enumerates and describes various prayers of quietude, of a greater or less degree, which lift the soul almost to ecstasy and rapture, without depriving it of the use of the faculties. To call these prayers of quietude "miraculous" is making a very general use of the word. It is hardly right to employ it when the soul during contemplation keeps entire self-possession, is conscious of its own interior state, and is at liberty to put an end to it at any moment by merely ceasing to pray. At the same time, these states of quietude are very superior to ordinary contemplation.

The Holy Spirit is there exerting his influence above our own, and, in fact, we scarcely have the power to shorten the prayer, unless there is a serious reason, nor to diminish fervour by offering resistance. The prayer is miraculous beyond any doubt when the soul can neither begin nor end at will. Then God does well-nigh everything, merely allowing the soul the liberty of lovingly consenting to his supernatural operations. The soul then receives treasures of grace, and gets all the profit there is to be had, without losing any of the merit of prayer.

It remains for us to say a word about ordinary vocal and mental prayer, regarded in the person who makes it. Here everything depends on our good will. The most perfect mental prayer carelessly performed is not worth as much as a short vocal prayer fervently uttered. As we show our good will by corresponding with the grace of the Holy Spirit, it is useless and even imprudent to choose a particular kind of prayer because of its intrinsic value. We must not, for example, say: "I wish to make the prayer of faith, since it is more fruitful in result than any other." It would only tire one, without any advantage, to practise this prayer without being drawn to it by the grace of God. We must always accommodate our actions to the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and for this reason we should meditate, practise affective prayer, or contemplate according as we feel incited to do so, without being influenced by the respective value of these prayers. This is the only way to make our prayer efficacious.

The same rule does not apply to vocal prayers, especially those performed in public. It is quite allowable to choose them according to their intrinsic worth. But we must never forget that the complete value of these prayers depends on our own personal dispositions. To say or hear Mass without any devotion, and with the mind and heart occupied with worldly affairs, is of no profit to us whatever. We may even make ourselves worthy of blame, by wanting in respect towards this adorable sacrifice. On the contrary, a short vocal prayer attentively said, with much love for God, will

obtain for us the greatest graces, even that of contemplation itself. S Teresa gives a remarkable instance which clearly proves that in our dealings with God external means are only secondary. Our interior disposition is the most important, and if this is perfect a simple "Our Father" will be enough to lift us to a great height of love for almighty God. S Teresa relates the incident as follows[1]: "I know a person who could never reach further than vocal prayer, and yet by practising this, she possessed everything; if she did not pray vocally her understanding was so distracted that she could not endure it; but would that all of us practised mental prayer so well. In certain 'Pater Nosters' which she recited on the mysteries of the Passion, and in some few other prayers also, she continued to pray vocally for two or three hours. She once came to me exceedingly afflicted 'because she knew not how to practise mental prayer, neither could she contemplate, but only pray vocally.' I asked her what she said, and perceived that though she kept to the 'Pater Noster,' she enjoyed pure contemplation, and God raised her even to the *prayer of union.*"

[1] *Way of Perfection,* ch. xxxi.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IMPERFECT PRAYERS

PRAYER is imperfect when, though good in itself, it does not fulfil all the conditions which are required to make it efficacious. In the words of S James: "We ask and receive not: because we ask amiss."[1] Spiritual writers, following S Basil and S Thomas, have enumerated the necessary conditions. Humility and trust are the most important, and we have dealt with them at length in Chapter IV. There is a great deal more to be said on this important subject, but we must be brief, and will not repeat what has been already said. The prayer of faith, when made according to the guidance set forth in this book, is one long courageous effort to acquire these two virtues. The advice already given should be carefully observed and followed out.

Another important condition is to make our petitions properly. We should address them to God in the name of Jesus Christ, *in nomine meo*, as our Lord instructed us, when he promised to give ear to our prayer. Now S Augustine observes that we may not ask, in the name of our Saviour, things which would prejudice our own salvation.[2] Generally speaking, we refrain from formulating particular requests during contemplation. The soul sighs after God, and aspires to be united to him by love. In possessing him, it has the certainty of possessing all things, and there is no need to make special mention of any particular thing. At the same time, it is permissible to make the petitions contained in the "Our Father," leaving them quite general in scope. No fault whatever can be found with a prayer made thus.

But contemplative souls, outside the time of prayer, may have occasion to ask some favour of God. They

[1] Jas. iv 3.

[2] *In Joannem*, v 102.

should then be most careful to do so with the greatest purity of intention. If they need some temporal blessing, either for themselves or for others, they should ask for it with respectful submission to the judgement of Almighty God. We ourselves can never know whether these temporal goods would be beneficial or harmful to our salvation. In the latter case, far better, of course, to be without them. It would be insolent of us to remind God of his promises, and to insist on having our prayer answered. He has promised to do everything that is good for us, but the good he means is the real good which leads us to heaven; he did not promise to grant us good things which are so in appearance only, but in reality lead to hell. He alone knows the future and the use we will make of temporal goods, and he alone perceives whether it would be for our real happiness to grant or to refuse our requests. Let us lovingly accept his decision. Even if it is contrary to our desires, it is the best for our soul's welfare and our prayer will not have been made in vain. A respectful submission, which restrains the murmur on our lips, must also be given when God refuses to hear prayers which are to all appearances most holy, yet should not have been made, inasmuch as some detailed advantage is asked for which would not be suitable for the soul. Thus S Paul thrice asked to be delivered from a serious temptation, and our Lord expressly refused his petition, saying: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is made perfect in infirmity."[1] Our Lord, in fact, did not say to his Apostles: "Pray to be altogether exempt and free from temptation"; but, "Pray that you enter not into temptation."[2] In the Litany of the Saints, we ask God to overcome and bring to the dust the enemies of the Church, and public prayers are ordered to the same effect. When these prayers are made by thousands of holy, fervent souls, they are certainly pleasing to God and merit to be heard. All the same, God does not always grant what we ask, and allows his enemies to be victorious. If the Apostles, rising from their sleep in the Garden of Olives, had begged the heavenly

[1] 2 Cor. vii 9. [2] Mark xiv 38.

Father not to allow his son to be crucified, their prayer would have been unanswered, for Jesus himself had asked in vain that the chalice of his Passion should be taken from him. It is the same with the general temptations and persecutions which try the Church so severely, and the particular temptations to which each of us are exposed. Why should we be spared when S Paul was not? The mind of God is infinitely above our puny intelligence. After we have made our prayer, we must adore his decisions, whatever they may be, in silence and love.

Two other necessary conditions are fervent desire and persevering application, and these are especially necessary when the prayer is made absolutely and unreservedly. This is the case with the first three petitions of the "Our Father," and even with those that follow, provided their purity remains unimpaired by descending to precise and particular details. Before granting these graces, God wishes us to appreciate them at their true value. If we received them too quickly there would be a danger of underestimating their real worth. This is the reason why God appears so slow in answering them. There is no doubt what the final issue of our prayer must be. We are certain, and must be certain, of being heard sooner or later. The least doubt on this subject would be an affront to almighty God. When God has made formal promises sworn on oath, how is it possible to hesitate without offering him a grave injury? It is for us to persevere with renewed fervour. He is pleased with importunity and violence, as he has taken care to assure us: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."[1]

The means of combining successfully all these conditions, is by preparing the soul for prayer. The Holy Spirit teaches us to do so in the Book of Ecclesiasticus: "Before prayer, prepare thy soul; and be not as a man that tempteth God."[2] The ideas which flood our mind, the passions which surge in our breast, fatigue of body, etc.—all these things widen the distance between us

[1] Matt. xi 12. [2] xviii 23.

and God, and make it impossible to speak to him in a fitting manner, if we have not taken the time to prepare. We would not think of appearing in the presence of a great worldly personage with clothes disarranged and dirty. Why do so before God, in whose sight our actions, feelings, and thoughts are, as it were, the clothing of the soul? Let us cleanse ourselves beforehand by acts of contrition and humility. S Teresa advises us to say the *Confiteor* before we begin our prayer. We must also put the soul's garments in order by restoring calm to our mind and heart. To be still more successful in our preparation, ask the Holy Spirit to come to our assistance and make it with us, since he it is who should help us to pray.

Talking of the dangers which come to us from the wanderings of our mind during meditation, we have already drawn attention to the prayer which the Church has placed in the breviary to be recited before Divine Office. Every word of it is worthy of the most careful reflection. After we have asked God to preserve us from useless, perverse, and irrelevant thoughts, we beseech him to shed light on our understanding and inflame our heart with love. We ask that we may succeed in reciting the Divine Office with dignity, attentiveness and fervour: *digne, attente ac devote;* and then we shall merit to be heard: *et exaudiri merear.* This is the preparation for prayer advised by the Church. We shall pray without fault if we are dignified in bodily attitude, if our mind is attentive, and if we are filled with devotion and fervour. The first condition is easy enough, and the second also, if we are, above all, attentive to the presence of God. In reciting Divine Office, it is often impossible to be attentive to the meaning of the words, but this is not absolutely necessary. Fervour of heart depends entirely on ourselves. When we have asked God for it, we must use all the effort we can command in order to bring it about. The prayer of faith, practised with fidelity, will form in us the habit of desiring and consecrating to God all the energy of which this faculty of the soul is capable.

Some prayers need no preparation, such as the spon-

taneous soarings of the heart produced by fervent souls all through the day. These are called ejaculatory prayers. But for a prayer of any length preparation is necessary, and no one is exempt from this duty. The length of the preparation may vary according to the dispositions of each soul. Those who have attained to divine union and live in a continual state of prayer, are practically always prepared. One of the first nuns of the Visitation once asked the advice of S Francis de Sales on this subject in the following way: "If I were seeking an interview with your lordship in the palace and were fortunate enough to meet you in the courtyard, should I refrain from speaking to you on the spot? Would you make me first go into the reception room of the palace, and not attempt to speak a word until all the necessary preliminaries had been performed?"[1] S Francis de Sales smiled and made no answer. Souls who are united to God may address him familiarly as soon as they meet. Like S Francis de Sales, our Lord lovingly approves of their freedom and instant recognition.

[1] *Life of M. Perrone*, ch. xiii.

CHAPTER XXIX

FALSE PRAYERS

For the better understanding of a truth in all its beauty and vigour, it is sometimes useful to regard the opposite errors which harm and disfigure it. So before bringing this book to an end we will go rapidly through some false states of prayer. Prayer is false when, instead of being based on some religious truth, it rests on error and superstition. If our dealings with God are to be good and useful, they must necessarily be under his supervision. He is the Sovereign Master of all creatures, and none of them are necessary for his happiness. If he deigns to incline towards us, and lend an ear to our prayers, this is an act of pure goodness and infinite condescension on his part. It is, then, first of all necessary for him to assist our ignorance, and teach us how he would be honoured, and under what conditions our prayers will be heard. Relying on this knowledge, we can draw near to him with confidence. He will not fail to hear our prayer if we pray in accordance with his orders and his teaching, and trust in his goodness and promises. The guidance for true prayer must therefore be found in the pages of divine revelation both of the Old and New Testament. These rules have never changed, but before the time of Jesus Christ they were scarcely known by any but a few chosen souls. God's chosen people did not understand them, and were frequently drawn into the grossest errors of idolatry. To prevent them from falling into this pit of iniquity, it became necessary to give them an exterior form of worship, with various offerings and bloody sacrifices, which were the prophetic figure of the sacrifice of the Cross. After the immolation on Calvary, their place was taken by the eucharistic sacrifice of our altars. God chose a

new people, and the knowledge of true prayer was made common in every breast. He taught them how to adore him in spirit and in truth. The prayer of faith, the nature of which has been outlined in this book, is a development of the doctrine conveyed to the world by Jesus Christ, and to be found in the Gospel. Those who respectfully read the Holy Scriptures can learn how to pray to God in truth. This favour is offered to heretics and schismatics, for they all have the books of revelation; it is offered even to Jews in the books of the Old Testament. At the same time many of these, deceived by their private judgement in interpreting Holy Writ, have altered the true healthy doctrine, and perverted their prayer. Catholics alone, relying on the authority of the Church, are certain of never being deceived.

Yet a false notion of prayer has tried for a moment to penetrate into the bosom of the Catholic Church, an attempt for which the devil is well qualified. In the sixteenth century certain writers put contemplation beyond the reach of ordinary people, by presenting it as a miraculous kind of prayer. The only means of prayer left to the faithful was meditation. The result was discouragement to multitudes of people for whom meditation had become impossible. Then the devil completed his attack on prayer by instituting novelties which went to the opposite excess. A layman unskilled in theology (François Malaval) and a woman (Mme. Guyon) published some small books, says Bossuet, in order to place contemplation within the reach of every soul. These were: *An Easy Exercise for Lifting the Soul to Contemplation;* and *A Short, Easy Method of Prayer.*[1] The method of these people was very ingenious. It consisted in making once for all an act of love of God, by which the soul gave itself entirely to him, and wished never to recall this surrender. By this, divine union was attained. There was no need for any further striving either in prayer or outside of it. Since the soul belonged to God, the only thing was to allow him to act as he pleased. It was God who acted in us, and all our actions

[1] *La pratique facile pour élever l'âme à la contemplation; Le moyen court et très facile pour faire oraison.*

became divine. This was a very easy matter. Those who professed this doctrine dispensed for the rest of their life with all the labour of mortification, and with all the work of the will during prayer, whereas real contemplation is impossible without it. They appeared to be praying, whereas in reality they were stopping up the very sources of prayer. They made indolence divine, and gave a free hand to all the evil inclinations of nature. Thus many, instead of becoming saints, fell into excesses of the most shameful kind. They would then comfort themselves by the thought that their blemishes were so many means employed by God to make them more humble, and strengthen their union with him. Bossuet was raised up by God to combat this monstrous error, and in this he was completely successful. Quietism never recovered from the blow he dealt it by his pastoral instructions on the nature of mental prayer.[1] In their desire to popularize contemplation so unreasonably, the Quietists succeeded in bringing it into greater disrepute. They widened the distance between them and the works of the mystical writers, and the faithful became still less acquainted with the true science of prayer.

People outside the Catholic Church may use a false prayer in two ways. Firstly, when they pray to false gods instead of to the only true God. Lucifer fell from heaven because he wished to be equal to the Most High, and in his fall he kept this delirium of pride. We know from the Gospel how he conveyed Jesus to the top of a high mountain, and showing him all the kingdoms of the earth, had the audacity to say: "All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me."[2] He had been successful in obtaining the adoration of multitudes, which was the beginning of idolatry. It is by

[1] Although Quietism ceased to have much influence after Bossuet's great refutation of its errors, it was not absolutely crushed out. In fact, this heresy will always exist, as it is an irresistible enticement for devout people without fervour, and without courage, as it dispenses them from the work of mortification. Thus, many traces of it are found up and down the pages of history. The Quietists were very numerous in Belgium, for instance, during the sixteenth century.

[2] Matt. iv. 9.

fear and deceit that Satan lures men into his kingdom. The true God, because he is good, requires as homage offerings of the fruits of the earth, and clean animals, which were afterwards used for human nourishment. The devil, whose heart is filled with envy and hate, required human sacrifices. For many years did he hold the earth under this reign of terror, but Jesus Christ destroyed his empire: "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out."[1] Only the ruins of this empire remain in certain quarters of the globe into which Christianity has not yet penetrated. There the devil holds the sole monopoly of prayer. A missionary asked some savages whether they did not believe in a God who was good and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth. They said that they did believe; and when he further asked them why they did not pray to him, they answered: "That would be useless, since, being good, he will never do us any harm. We pray to the evil ones in order that they may spare us." Such is their understanding of prayer, and they never get beyond it. Even in Catholic countries Satan has not given up hope of recovering once more his circle of adorers, and for that purpose he has recourse to the practice of magic and spiritualism. By satisfying the vain curiosity of minds that have become diseased through their love for the mysterious, he ends by bringing them as worshippers to his feet. What a number of poor souls there are who have given up praying to God and devote themselves to spirit worship!

Finally, prayer is false when, although addressed to God, the petitions made are unsuitable and unbecoming. If we desire to obtain favours from him, which he has either not promised at all, or promised under different circumstances, the prayer is displeasing to him and useless. This is the kind of prayer that is generally made outside the fold of the Catholic Church. Men whose minds have not been raised up by faith put all their happiness in the possession of this world's goods. If they have very much trouble in procuring them, they

[1] John xii 31.

have recourse to prayer. It is not wrong in itself to ask God for temporal favours. He grants them willingly, when doing so is a means of gaining our love, of making us know him better in all his infinite goodness, and of drawing our souls to him. But if instead of seeking our eternal happiness in him, we seek it in the enjoyment of creatures, how can we possibly ask God to help us to attain this object? The prayers of persons outside the Catholic Church, and still more so of those outside any Christian community, are often of this kind. The Paradise sought and prayed for by the Mohammedan is one of voluptuous delights. Jews seek from God the goods of this world. If they are religiously inclined, they thank him for his good will in granting these things to them; but it never enters their mind for one moment to detach their heart from creatures in order to turn towards God, and seek their whole happiness in love of him. It is the fashion in these days to make much of the Buddhists' manner of prayer, and to exalt their morality above that of the Gospel. Now the Buddhist prays like the Quietist. He aspires after the repose of forgetfulness; he forces his soul to enter into Nirvana—that is to say, the cessation of every kind of activity. This prayer may indeed draw them away from evil, but of what use is it in doing good? Where is the love of God and the effort on the part of the will to serve him, to become like to him, and to be worthy one day of being united to him for ever?

Every religion except Christianity has false, base, unworthy ideas as to the meaning of prayer. Often instead of being addressed to God, it is addressed to his worst enemy, the devil. Generally it is very far from heaven, and asks God to be the medium of our material well-being and grossest pleasures. Never is prayer regarded, in the words of S Teresa, as "a friendly intercourse with God, in which the soul converses entirely alone with him, and is never weary of expressing love for him, whom she knows loves her in return."[1] Yet God calls all men to be his friends; he

[1] *Life*, viii.

gives to all the grace of prayer, and if they are sincere at heart, they profit by this grace in spite of the sea of error in which they are plunged. Gradually they are turned to the light and sometimes God takes them thither in a truly miraculous way.

CHAPTER XXX

CONVERSION AND THE PRAYER OF FAITH

PERSONS who have not the faith may be divided into two different classes. There are those who have never had it, and those who have had it once and lost it. What must be done in order to gain these souls to God? For without faith it is impossible to be pleasing to him, as S Paul explicitly declares: *Sine fide, impossibile est placere Deo.*[1]

The great Apostle himself answers the question: "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and is a rewarder of them that seek him": *Credere enim oportet accedentem ad Deum, quia est, et inquirentibus se remunerator sit.* Thus the faith which is indispensable for pleasing God and obtaining his mercy, is reducible to these two truths. First of all, the fact of *his existence.* We must believe in a superior Being, infinitely powerful, Maker and Preserver of all existing things, Sovereign Lord of the universe. Secondly, *his goodness.* We must believe that this Being, who is so great and so far above us, is yet good to all his creatures. He does not despise and repel them. If they wish to seek him and turn towards him, he allows them to draw near, and most generously rewards these first movements of the heart.

The existence and goodness of God are truths which are in perfect conformity with the light of reason. Properly speaking, they belong to the realm of science rather than that of faith. How, then, can S Paul make faith consist in accepting these two truths? The fact is that the Apostle presupposes a vigorous acceptance of them. They must not be held in a purely theoretical way. They should have a practical bearing on actual life, by drawing us nearer to God (*accedentem*

[1] Heb. xi 6.

ad Deum), in order to find him (*inquirentibus se*). Now the first act in our search must necessarily be to ask of God the grace of knowing him, by promising a humble, loving, and complete faith in all that he teaches. It may be expressed in a prayer such as, "O my God, who art thou? I wish to know thee, and to know thy will. Speak, Lord; what wilt thou have me to do?" For a soul completely ignorant of all revelation, but moved by the conviction of God's existence and goodness, it is impossible to imagine any other way of seeking an unknown God. Now the desire to listen and the promise to believe, on the part of one who has not the faith, is the beginning of true faith. And in the will this faith is complete and all-embracing, though as yet the mind is deprived of the knowledge of revealed truths. The will accepts them altogether without regarding them in detail, and it accepts them on the authority of God. What prayer can bring about this state of mind in the soul of one who has not the faith? Can he meditate, as we do, on the truths of revelation? Impossible, because he does not yet know what those truths are. Can he make affective prayer? Likewise impossible, as it is the result of previous meditation. When we have often reflected upon the life of our Lord, and the scenes of his Passion, a general remembrance suffices to produce the keenest emotions, which make it possible to love God without reflection. The soul without faith is ignorant of these truths, and is thus incapable of affective prayer.

What, then, is this ignorant yet upright and generous soul to do? It is able to know God and his goodness in a general way. There is no particular revealed truth in its intelligence which may act as fuel for meditation or sense emotion, and so it has to be content with this general knowledge alone. There is nothing else to sustain its prayer. Yet this is sufficient, and with its help the soul may ask God for a better understanding of him, and promise to believe and obey him. Of course, the prayer of a person without the faith is very far from being the same as the contemplation of a Catholic, who from a general remembrance of revealed

truth acquires a great force of love for God. Yet we are right in saying that it is the obscure contemplation of the divine goodness. The desires which accompany it must be very pleasing to God. He cannot refuse to listen, for he rewards all those who seek him. *Inquirentibus se remunerator.* Sooner or later he will bring this man into contact with some preacher of the Gospel, who will teach him the truths of faith.

It may occasion surprise to see the name of contemplation given to the prayer of one who does not yet possess the faith. But we do not put it on a par with the contemplation of a Catholic. An infinite distance separates the two. The first is rudimentary and incomplete; the second is perfect. The unbeliever attains to faith by its means, and prepares himself to believe humbly in all revealed truth when the knowledge of it is brought to him. In contemplation proper these truths are realized in a pre-eminent way; they are admired and relished as a whole.[1] When the unbeliever has been instructed in the truths of revelation, he will abandon his former prayer and begin meditating on revealed truth; whereas the Catholic does just the reverse, and ascends from the meditation of these truths to the state of obscure contemplation. Consequently an unbeliever cannot be said to practise obscure contemplation. As long as he is confined to the darkness of unbelief, his prayer will never constitute a mystic state, and will never be able to raise him to union with God. In spite, however of all these differences, the unbeliever's way of prayer is not meditation, but an obscure contemplation of God, considered in his existence and goodness. The contemplation of the Catholic and of the unbeliever have certain things in common, notwithstanding the difference which separates the one from the other: the absence, for example, of all reasoning and particular reflections, the adhesion of

[1] Speaking to the Prior of the Carmelites, who had persuaded him to write *The Spiritual Canticle*, S John of the Cross said: "For though some may be altogether ignorant of scholastic theology, by which the divine verities are explained, yet they are not ignorant of mystical theology, the science of love, by which those verities are not only learned, but at the same time relished also" (Works, ii, p. 3).

mind and heart to all divine truth taken together in a general and obscure way. This adherence in the unbeliever is produced by the grace of prayer, bestowed directly by God.

A comparison will explain our meaning better. There is an enormous difference between the hut of a poor peasant and the palace of a king. Yet both buildings have all the essential characteristics of a human habitation. They have walls and a roof. The peasant in his hut and the king in his palace are both sheltered from inclement weather. They do not sleep in the open air. At the same time, if the peasant ever becomes a rich man, he will not be satisfied with a mere hut, but will require a proper house with all the comforts of civilization. When the unbeliever becomes a Christian he will change his manner of prayer in the same way. It is useful to speak in this way, in order to reassure those souls who have been kept away from practising the prayer of faith, through its being represented to them as something extraordinary and miraculous. On the contrary, it is the most simple kind of prayer, since even the unbeliever begins to pray in a similar kind of way. As regards the faithful, God lures them to this simplicity in prayer in order to make them walk more surely and quickly in the way of perfection. If only all unbelievers were sincere at heart, if only they prayed with the will to know and believe all the truths revealed by God, how easy would their conversion be! Unfortunately there are among their number so many perverted souls, enslaved to passion, and steeped in every kind of vice. This it is that makes their conversion so difficult.

It is also depravity of heart which has made so many Catholics lose the faith. In this case the beginning of every conversion must be sincerity of heart and an upright life. But if a man who has lost the faith is yet conspicuous for purity of heart and a blameless life, we think that the best means of bringing him back to God, is to teach him to pray with the simplicity of an unbeliever who is desirous of reaching the truth. When we come across poor souls in this state, our first im-

pulse is to speak to them on the points of revelation to which their mind refuses consent. We are eager to dispel their particular prejudice, and as a rule our lengthy arguments have only the effect of confirming their obstinacy in error. The method is clearly wrong. Loss of faith in these people rests on a secret intellectual pride, which has not sufficient respect for God's authority. That is the root of the evil, and there the remedy must be applied. For that reason it is inexpedient to attack the unbeliever on the ground of his own error. It is far better not to try to refute him by an empty show of knowledge. Knowledge is the most unsuitable means of overthrowing intellectual pride, for it only adds fuel and strengthens it. Pass by all these particular errors. Say as they do in the schools: "*Transeat,*" Let it alone, speak of something else. Try to approach the person in this way: "Do you not believe in God and his goodness? Do you not realize the necessity of knowing him better and becoming worthy to receive his graces? You do. Very well; have immediate recourse to him in the sincerity of prayer. Say to him with David: *Cor mundum crea in me Deus, et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.*[1] Create a clean heart in me, O God. Grant to me a new and upright mind; that is to say, a mind which is not open to bias and subterfuge, but openly seeks the truth without mental reservation of any kind: you are afraid that creatures are coming between your soul and God; well, then, ask him to enlighten you and clear away this obstacle, in order that you may respectfully receive the truths which are presented to you."

When you have successfully persuaded an unbeliever to pray in this way, it will not be long before he is converted. If he asks for light with a humble act of the will, and firmly resolves to accept the whole body of revealed doctrine, before he has any knowledge of details, faith will return to him once more. For we must never forget the fact that faith is a grace. Study and discussion may clear the ground, and prepare a soul to receive this gift of God. But prayer is neces-

[1] Ps. l 12.

sary for the actual obtaining of it. Simple unaffected prayer, like that of the unbeliever who is seeking for God in the sincerity of his heart, is the most efficacious means of leading an incredulous and doubting soul from darkness to the full light of truth. We have seen in Chapter XVIII how the attachment of the mind to some particular error, under the appearance of truth, when increased by study and meditation, may mean loss of faith in souls steeped in intellectual pride. The way of bringing them back is to draw them by means of contemplation to the exercise of a general faith, which accepts in a body all the truths taught by the Church. Is it not even more necessary to destroy, in incredulous, doubting souls, this same attachment to error? And may we not hope for this happy result by drawing them to pray without meditation and reasoning, in humble contemplation of the divine goodness?

This advice of ours is, after all, nothing but our Lord's warning to his disciples when he said to them: "If you do not become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."[1] He spoke in the same sense to Nicodemus: "Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."[2] Become a little child—that is, have the feelings of a little child. Now what is their state of mind? In their early years they had only one inclination, that of the heart. They did not understand what difference it made whether their parents were rich or poor, learned or ignorant, king or subject, general or soldier. But they knew without hesitation who was their father and mother, and instinctively ran to them at every turn, to get the advantage of their kindness and love.

By the prayer of faith, even in its beginnings, even in an imperfect and rudimentary state as may be practised by unbelievers, the heart is drawn to this childlike simplicity. Follow the counsel given by the Holy Spirit to people who live far from God, and feel the need of returning again to him. He tells them: "Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek him in

[1] Matt. xviii 3. [2] John iii 3.

simplicity of heart. For he is found by them that tempt him not (by intellectual doubts): and he showeth himself to them that have faith in him."[1] Our greatest enemy is intellectual pride. Become humble like little children. Go to God, not with the help of learned reflections, but with the aid of a blind faith in his goodness. Pray to him in the obscurity of this faith, by producing acts straight from the heart, and inspired with the utmost trust. If an incredulous soul is persuaded to pray in this way, he will find that the prejudice, which separated him from the bosom of the true Church, will gradually be dispelled.

Our Lord one day asked the Apostles this question: "The son of man, when he cometh, shall he find, think you, faith on earth?"[2] It was a prophecy of the perils to which Christian peoples would be exposed by the progress of civilization. This progress brings in its wake the diffusion of science among the people. Now a little knowledge with a great deal of pride easily leads to doubt and incredulity. The great and only remedy for such an evil is humility of heart before God. To acquire it we must fall on our knees before him in contemplation of his grandeur and goodness, and thus we will attain to prayer in its simplicity. The very simplicity of this prayer strengthens the Christian faith, and makes it possible for those who have lost it to return to the Church once more.

[1] Wisdom i 1, 2. [2] Luke xviii 8.

CHAPTER XXXI

EPILOGUE: PRAYER IS A SCIENCE

Doubtless several people in perusing the pages of this book will say: Evidently prayer is a science. It has its principles and rules. These must be studied in order to apply them advantageously, if we wish to succeed in praying well. We will strengthen this conclusion by setting out some special proofs in support of this thesis.

The first is drawn from the well-known facts of the case, facts which are to be found even in the Gospel itself. The Apostles one day said to our Lord: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."[1] Our Lord did so, and from that time every saint whom God has given disciples has taught them how to pray. Some have done so by writing splendid books, which we have with us still. Every spiritual director who does his duty hands on, in turn, this teaching to other souls. M. l'Abbé Saudreau supplies a striking proof of the fact which we are referring to. The volume entitled *La vie d'union* includes a whole literary of books on prayer, written by saints from the second century to our own day. Some saints have written a great number. The author makes a summary of the principal treatises, and brings out the perfect uniformity of their teaching.

We should not be astonished at this eagerness of the saints to give to the world their teaching on prayer. It is a fact that to pray properly something more than good will is necessary; we must also have the proper knowledge. This science is all the more necessary, since, as S Augustine says, the knowledge of how to lead a saintly life depends on it: "Truly, that man knows how to live well who knows how to pray well": *Vere novit recte vivere qui recte novit orare.*[2] Of

[1] Luke xi 1.

[2] Sermon lv.

course, good will is the first and most important condition of success in everything. Remember the answer made by S Thomas to his sister: "To become a saint, you must desire it," he said to her three times in succession. But if good will is there, its first manifestation is searching after requisite knowledge. If a soul does not wish to be taught, it is presumptuous and foolish, or else its good will is not sincere.

Hear S John of the Cross on the obligation there is of knowing the science of prayer, and the evil results which follow on ignorance in so grave a matter: "There are some—and it is sad to see them—who toil and labour, wearying themselves, and yet go backwards, because they make the fruit which is profitable to consist in that which profits not, but which is rather a hindrance; and others who, in rest and quietness, make great advancement."[1] He says again: "There are souls who, instead of abandoning themselves to the care and protection of God, hinder him rather by their indiscreet behaviour and by their resistance."[2] He explains his meaning by the example of little children who, when their mothers would carry them in their arms, struggle and cry that they may be allowed to walk. They walk like little children, and if their mother withdraws her hand they fall, so that at length they allow her to have her way, and then at last proceed very rapidly without fatigue and danger. "How miserable it is," S John of the Cross exclaims, "to see many souls, to whom God has given grace to advance—and who, had they taken courage, would have reached perfection—remain satisfied with narrow-minded views of God's dealings, through want of will or through ignorance, or because there are none to direct their steps. And in the end, when our Lord has compassion on them, and leads them on in spite of these hindrances, they arrive late, with much difficulty, and less merit, because they have not submitted themselves to his ways, nor suffered him to plant their feet on the pure and certain road of union."[3] These quotations are all taken

[1] Prologue. *Works*, i, p. 6. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[3] *Ibid.*

from the Prologue to his works. The saint declares that he has written the treatises out of compassion for these poor souls, in order to draw them out of their state of ignorance.

Where are we to find the science of prayer? Clearly in the school of the saints. They know what they are saying, for they have practised it. The best way is to go straight to the works which they have written. But this cannot always be done. We must then find their doctrine in the writers who have summarized their teaching, and made it accessible to the ordinary reader, by presenting it in an orderly, methodical manner. In the writings of the saints on prayer, there is a certain warmth which passes to the reader, and inflames him with the desire for sanctity. It is a fact of experience and easy to observe. Père Caussade speaks of it in the following terms: "People who have experienced it say with Bossuet: As soon as the writings of the mystics have become distasteful on account of miserable preconceived notions, we do not find, even in the cloister, a great number of interior souls absolutely detached, dead to the world and to themselves. On the contrary, in the communities where there exists a great affection for the works of S John of the Cross and his spiritual daughter S Teresa, S Francis de Sales, Père Lallemant and his two disciples, Père Rigoleuc and Père Surin, there reigns proportionately a greater interior spirit, more perfect self-abnegation, more humility and evangelical simplicity."[1]

Among mystical writings, the most important are those of S John of the Cross, especially the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Obscure Night*. Even if we had read all the works of the other saints, these two treatises would still have to be read, and carefully studied. They contain teaching of the highest importance which is not to be found anywhere else. On the other hand, the doctrine contained here once understood, we know all that is essential. Of course, the spiritual works written by the other saints may always be read with pleasure and profit. But if neither the

[1] *Instr. Spirit.*, I, Dial. préliminaire.

time nor the opportunity is at hand, we can bear the loss without very great inconvenience.

Among the authors who have best succeeded in summarizing the teaching of the saints on contemplation, the most remarkable is Bossuet. His pastoral instruction against Quietism contains much mystical doctrine, and in order to bring it within the reach of everyone, Père Caussade has presented it in catechetical form divided into two parts. The first is the most important, to our mind, and the value of it may be judged from the number of editions it has passed through (Libraire Lecoffre). We also specially recommend the works of M. l'Abbé Saudreau. We have already spoken of his *Vie d'union*. In the *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*, a work in two volumes written after the method of S Teresa, the author follows the soul, step by step, from its first conversion to its arrival at a state of perfection. Throughout the process he shows, from the writings of the saints, what the soul must do in order to become detached from creatures, and united to God by prayer, passing from meditation to contemplation under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The number of excellent writers is very large indeed, and cannot be given here. It would be well to make a special point of reading the works of these holy souls, whose authority we have quoted in the pages of this small volume. But we cannot sufficiently emphasize the need of putting souls, eager for instruction, on their guard against two sorts of spiritual books. The first, which are very numerous, are works written out of purely scientific curiosity. Of course, science is absolutely essential in a course of theology. But when we are addressing the faithful at large, there is another end to be kept in view. What advantage do pious people get from reading books on prayer which do not convince them of its necessity? On the contrary, once their curiosity is stirred up, there is every danger that the mind will put fresh obstacles in the way of really good prayer.[1] The other kind of dangerous spiritual book is that which accompanies its teaching on mental prayer by adverse criticism against

[1] See Chapter VII.

contemplation and mystical writers. It is good to write books on meditation, provided they are confined to that subject; but if, under the pretext of exalting the value of this pious exercise, they throw discredit on prayers of a superior order, then those books are bad, and do grave injustice to the saints who have written mystical works.

Some writers fall into this excessive zeal, through the love they have for the *Exercises of S Ignatius*. Everyone recognizes the value of a book which has received such high approbation from sovereign pontiffs. Yet we are well within our rights if we regard this work as many holy Jesuits have done—men who themselves have died in the odour of sanctity. In the language of one of them, Père Surin: "S Ignatius, in the *Exercises*, sets out the meditations with the view of drawing souls to God. As a general rule, those who made the exercises were souls not given to prayer at all. However excellent this book may be, it does not follow that we are to use, all our lives, the same meditations without exception. We should allow every liberty to people who always practise the presence of God, who enjoy it, and who have attained, or very nearly attained, a state of union with him."[1]

Every Jesuit speaks in the same way, and those who are adverse to contemplation cannot justify their attitude by appealing to the reverence which is due to the *Exercises of S Ignatius*. Criticisms of this sort are most hurtful to souls, and absolutely unpardonable. Those who are guilty of this practice would do well to meditate on the serious warning given by Bossuet, as to their position when face to face with the judgement of God. The learned Bishop ends his exposition of the short way of practising the prayer of faith and the simple presence of God, with the following prayer:

"O God, who by a wonderful concurrence of circumstances hast determined from all eternity the composition of this small book, permit not that certain souls, whether learned or devout, may ever be accused, at thy dread tribunal, of having closed the entrance into

[1] *Love of God*, III, x.

innumerable hearts, because thou wert wishing to enter therein by a simplicity which shocked them, and by a way which was unknown to them, although continually opened by the saints from the very first ages of the Church. Grant, moreover, that having become like little children, as Jesus Christ ordained, we may enter once through this small door, in order that we may more surely and efficaciously show the way to others. Amen."

APPENDIX

A SHORT DIRECTION FOR CONTEMPLATIVE SOULS BY SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

In *The Living Flame of Love* S John of the Cross explains line by line the four stanzas of this beautiful canticle. On reaching the third line of stanza iii, "The deep caverns of sense," he leaves the explanations and gives a short treatise of spiritual direction, for the use of souls called to the practice of obscure contemplation. This treatise is a striking confirmation of the doctrine contained in this book.

We had to establish the following truths: Nearly all generous souls who remain faithful to prayer receive, sooner or later, the grace of obscure contemplation. As soon as these souls have acquired the power of discerning and corresponding with this grace, they can practise at will the prayer of faith, which is an ordinary mystic prayer. Since these souls may make at will the prayer of faith, it is necessary for them to know its rules in order that they may faithfully observe them. If they do not know these rules, it is the duty of their director to enlighten them.

None of this would be true if, as some writers have affirmed, every kind of mystic prayer is an extraordinary favour, quite beyond our reach, and impossible for us to practise *even feebly for one instant.* Clearly, therefore, it would be wrong to make the attempt, since the desire for anything extraordinary is a fruitful source of illusion, and we should prudently confine ourselves to meditation. Spiritual directors should insist on souls remaining in the way of meditation, until they are forcibly lifted out of that state in a miraculous manner.

The fact is that mystical writers openly blame this excessive attachment to meditation, and blame also the

directors who advise souls in this way. No one has done so more persistently and more vehemently than S John of the Cross, as we shall presently see. In the short treatise on spiritual direction with which we are dealing, the saint outlines in a masterly way the truths of which we have given a summary. We might have inserted them earlier in this work, but this would have deprived the words of the great mystic of much of their force, by presenting them in little pieces. The treatise of S John of the Cross is divided into seventeen short chapters or paragraphs. We will give here the most important of them, beginning at § 4:[1]

"The soul therefore, considering that God is the chief agent in this matter, that it is he who guides it and leads it by the hand whither it knows not, namely, unto spiritual things beyond the reach of intellect, memory, and will, must take especial care to put no difficulties in the way of its guide, who is the Holy Ghost, on that road along which he leads it by the law of God and faith. Such a difficulty will be raised if the soul entrusts itself to a blind guide; and the blind guides of the soul which lead it astray are three, namely, the spiritual director, the devil, and its own self.

As to the first of these blind guides, it is of the greatest importance to the soul desirous of perfection and anxious not to fall back, to consider well into whose hands it resigns itself; for as the master, so is the disciple; as the father so the child. You will scarcely find one who is in all respects qualified to guide a soul in the higher parts of this road, or even in the ordinary divisions of it, for a director must be learned, prudent, and experienced. Though the foundations of good direction be learning and discretion, yet if experience of the higher ways be wanting, there are no means of guiding a soul therein when God is showing the way, and inexperienced directors will therefore inflict great evils on their penitents. Such directors, not understanding these ways of the spirit, will very frequently be the cause of souls losing the unction of the delicate ointments, by means of which the Holy Ghost is prepar-

[1] Works, ii, p. 266.

ing the soul for himself: *for they will guide them by other means of which they have read, but which are adapted only for beginners.* These directors knowing how to guide beginners only—and God grant that they may know that—will not suffer their penitents to advance, though it be the will of God, beyond the mere rudiments, *acts of reflection and imagination, whereby their profit is extremely little.*

" § 5. In order to have a clear perception of the state of beginners, we must keep in mind that it is one of meditation and of acts of reflection. It is necessary to furnish the soul in this state with matter for meditation, that it may make reflections and those interior acts, and avail itself of the sensible spiritual heat and fervour, for this is necessary in order to accustom the senses and desires to good things, so that by satisfying them by the sweetness thereof they may be detached from the world. When this is in some degree effected, *God begins at once to introduce the soul into the state of contemplation, and that very quickly,* especially in the case of religious, because these, having renounced the world, quickly fashion their senses and desires according to God. *They have, therefore, to pass at once from meditation to contemplation. This passage, then, takes place when the discursive acts and meditation fail, when sensible sweetness and the first fervours cease, when the soul cannot make reflections as before, nor find any sensible comfort, but is fallen into aridity,* because the spiritual life is changed, and the spirit is not cognizable by sense. And as all the natural operations of the soul, which are within its control, depend on the senses only, it follows that God is now working in a special manner in this state, *that it is he who infuses and teaches,* that the soul is the recipient on which he bestows spiritual blessings by contemplation, *the knowledge* and love of himself together; that is, he gives it the loving knowledge *without the instrumentality of its discursive acts, because it is no longer able to form them as before.*

" § 6. At this time, then, the direction of a soul must be wholly different from what it was at first. If formerly

it was supplied with matter for meditation and it did meditate, *now that matter must be withheld and meditation must cease*, because, as I have said, it cannot meditate, do what it will, and distractions are the result. If before it looked for fervour and sweetness and found them, *let it look for them no more nor desire them;* and if it attempt to seek them, not only will it not find them, but it will meet with aridity, because it turns away from the peaceful and tranquil good bestowed upon it, when it attempts to fall back on the operations of sense. In this way it loses the latter without gaining the former, because the senses have ceased to be the channel of spiritual good.

" Souls in this state are not to be forced to meditate, *nor to apply themselves to discursive reflections laboriously effected, neither are they to strive after sweetness and fervour*, for if they did so, they would be thereby placing obstacles in the way of the principal agent, who is God himself, for he is now secretly and quietly *infusing wisdom* into the soul, together with the loving knowledge of himself, independently of these divers acts, without their being multiplied or elicited, though he produces them sometimes specifically in the soul, and that for some space of time. And in that case, *the soul, too, must be lovingly intent upon God without specifically eliciting other acts beyond those to which he inclines it;* it must be as it were passive, making no efforts of its own, purely, simply, and lovingly intent upon God, as a man who opens his eyes with loving attention. For as God is now dealing with the soul in the way of bestowing by simple and loving knowledge, so the soul also, on its part, must deal with him in the way of receiving by simple and loving knowledge, so that knowledge may be joined to knowledge, and love to love; because it is necessary here that the recipient should be adapted to the gift and not otherwise, and that the gift may be accepted and preserved as it is given.

" It is evident, therefore, that if the soul does not now *abandon its previous ways of meditation*, it will receive this gift of God in a scanty and imperfect manner, not

in that perfection with which it is bestowed; for the gift being so grand, and an infused gift, cannot be received in this scanty and imperfect way. Consequently, if the soul will at this time make efforts of its own, and encourage another disposition than that of passive loving attention, most submissive and calm, and if it does not abstain from its previous discursive acts, it will place a complete barrier against those graces which God is about to communicate to it in this loving knowledge. He gives his grace to beginners in the exercise of purgation, as I have said, and afterwards with an increase of the sweetness of love. But if the soul is to be the recipient of this grace passively, in the natural way of God, and not in the supernatural way of the soul, it follows that, in order to be such a recipient, it must be perfectly detached, calm, peaceful, and serene; it must be like the atmosphere, which the sun illumines and warms in proportion to its calmness and purity.

"Thus the soul must be attached to nothing, *not even to the subject of its meditation, not to sensible or spiritual sweetness*, because God requires a spirit so free, so annihilated, that every act of the soul, even of thought, of liking or disliking, will impede and disturb it, and break that profound silence of sense and spirit necessary for hearing the deep and delicate voice of God, who speaks to the heart in solitude.[1] . . .

"§ 7. . . . Strive, therefore, to root out of the soul all desire after sweetness, all efforts after meditations; do not disquiet it by any solicitude about spiritual things, still less after earthly things; establish it in an estrangement from all around, and in the utmost possible solitude. For the greater its progress in this, and the more rapidly it attains to this calm tranquillity, the more abundant will be the infusion of the Spirit of Divine Wisdom, the loving, calm, lonely, peaceful, sweet ravisher of the spirit. . . .

"§ 8. . . . These goods, then, these great riches, these sublime and delicate unctions, this knowledge of the Holy Ghost, are most easily disturbed, even by the slightest application of the senses or by the desire for

[1] Osee ii 14.

particular knowledge or sweetness. This is a serious evil and a matter of deep grief. O how sad, and how wonderful! The evil done is not perceived, and the cause of it is almost nothing, and yet it is more grievous, an object of deeper sorrow, and inflicts a greater stain, than any other, though seemingly more important, in common souls which have not attained to such a high estate of pureness. It is as if a beautiful painting were roughly handled; besmeared with coarse and vile colours; for the injury done is greater, more observable, and more deplorable, than it would be if a multitude of common paintings were thus bedaubed.

"Though this evil be so great that it cannot be exaggerated, it is still so common *that there is scarcely one spiritual director who does not inflict it upon souls whom God has begun to lead by this way to contemplation.* For whenever God is anointing a soul with the unction of loving knowledge, most delicate, serene, peaceful, lonely, strange to sense and imagination; whenever he withholds all sweetness from it, and suspends its power of meditation—because he reserves it for this lonely unction, inclined to solitude and quiet—a spiritual director will appear, who, like a rough blacksmith, knows only the use of his hammer, and who, because all his knowledge is limited to the coarser work, will say to it: Come, get rid of this, this is waste of time and idleness; arise and meditate, resume thine interior acts, for it is necessary that thou shouldst make diligent efforts of thine own: everything else is delusion and folly. Such a director as this does not understand the gradations of prayer, nor the ways of the spirit, neither does he consider that what he recommends the soul is too late, since it has passed through that state already, having attained to the state of sensitive abnegation; for when the goal is reached, and the journey ended, all further travelling must be away from the goal. . . .

"§ 9. . . . Say not, therefore, that thy penitent is making no progress, or is doing nothing, for if he have no greater pleasure than he once had in particular knowledge, he is advancing towards that which is

above nature. Neither do thou complain that thy penitent has no distinct perceptions, for if he had he would be making no progress, because God is incomprehensible, surpassing all understanding, and so the further the penitent advances, the further from himself must he go, walking by faith, believing and not seeing; *he thus draws nearer to God by not understanding, than by understanding.* Trouble not thyself about this, for if the intellect goes not backwards, occupying itself with distinct knowledge, it is going forwards; for to go forwards is to go more and more by faith. The intellect having neither the knowledge nor the power of comprehending God, advances towards him by not understanding. Thus, then, what thou judgest amiss in thy penitent is for his profit: namely, that he does not perplex himself with distinct perceptions, but walks onwards in perfect faith."

§ 10. SUMMARY. — Supernatural love for God does not need distinct knowledge or discursive acts.—God who is both light and love warms as well as enlightens. —The excellence of infused contemplation.—Complete detachment is a necessary disposition of the will.—The precept of love.

§ 11. SUMMARY.—Detachment of memory is a necessary disposition for contemplation.—Unhappy state of a soul called to the prayer of quietude, yet led by a director who is inexperienced in the ways of God.—The indescribable sufferings and the prejudice caused by this misdirection.—The injury done to God by destroying his work and glory.—Ignorance is inexcusable in a director of souls.

Towards the end of the section he says: "But it may be said that these directors err, perhaps, with good intentions, because their knowledge is scanty. Be it so; but they are not therefore justified in giving the rash counsels they do, without previously ascertaining the way and spirit of their penitent. And if they do not understand the case, it is not for them to interfere in what they do not comprehend, but rather to send their penitent to others who understand him better than they. It is not a trivial matter or a slight

fault to cause, by incompetent direction, the loss of inestimable blessings, and to endanger a soul. Thus, he who rashly errs, being under an obligation to give good advice—for so is everyone in the office he assumes—shall not go unpunished for the evil he has done. The affairs of God are to be handled with great caution and watchful circumspection, and especially this, which is so delicate, and so high, and where the gain is infinite if the direction given be right, and the loss also infinite if it be wrong."

§ 12. SUMMARY.—The imprudence of directors who keep souls in perpetual dependence on their guidance.—Illustration from the art of sculpture.—The director, as it were, roughly hews the statue, but God perfects it.—The spiritual tyranny of some.—The line of conduct which they ought to follow in directing souls.

§ 13. SUMMARY.—Second blind guide: the devil.—His efforts to divert a soul from the prayer of quietude.—How easily souls are deceived by his snares.—The illusions into which they fall.—How Satan values the loss of one great soul.

§ 14. SUMMARY.—The great ruin of a soul which has nearly attained to the prayer of quietude.—What must be done to prevent this evil.

". . . O souls, now that God shows you mercies so great, leading you into solitude and recollection, withdrawing you from the labours of sense, do not you return thereto. If your own exertions were once profitable, enabling you to deny the world and your own selves when you were but beginners, cease from them now when God of his mercy has begun to work in you, for now they will only embarrass you. If you will be careful to lay no stress on your own operations, withdrawing them from all things, and involving them in nothing—which is your duty in your present state—and wait lovingly and sincerely upon God at the same time—doing no violence to yourselves except to detach yourselves wholly, so as not to disturb your tranquillity and peace—God himself will feed you with the heavenly food, since you cease to hinder him."

§ 15. SUMMARY.—The evils brought upon the soul

by its own blindness.—All movement and action is an illusion.—The advantage of silence and repose.

"The third blind guide of the soul is the soul itself, which, not understanding its own state, disturbs and injures itself. For as the soul knows of no operations except those of sense, when God leads it into solitude, where it cannot exert its faculties and elicit the acts it elicited before, it appears to itself then to be doing nothing. . . .

"Let the soul abandon itself into the hands of God, and confide in him. He that will do so shall walk securely, for there is no danger then, unless the soul should attempt anything in its own strength, or by the exercise of its proper faculties."

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